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**Visva-Bharati Studies No. 6.**

## **A Monograph on Moslem Calligraphy**

**WITH 168 ILLUSTRATIONS OF ITS VARIOUS STYLES AND  
ORNAMENTAL DESIGNS**

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DEDICATED

TO

SJ. NANDALAL BOSE

to whose sympathy and insight I  
owe much of my appreciation of Moslem Art.



## FOREWORD

I owe a word of explanation to the readers for the somewhat rambling arrangement of the matter presented in these pages. What appear as chapters in this booklet are only republished articles from the pages of the *Visva-Bharati Quarterly*, to which I was invited to contribute on the subject. When I first agreed to write, I did not realize the exact nature of the task that I had thus undertaken. For, as I proceeded with my work, I was amazed to find that this the most important aspect of Moslem art had not so far been treated with the comprehensiveness which a subject of its importance legitimately required. I found, for instance, that the influence of the Syriac and the Manæchian calligraphy on the early development of Moslem calligraphy had not received the attention that it deserved ; inscriptions, both monumental and decorative, had generally been considered from epigraphical point of view and rarely from that of calligraphy ; no serious attempt seemed to have been made to view the whole field of Moslem calligraphy as a unit in itself, with a clear historical background of its own, against which styles appeared and disappeared as they gave birth to newer styles and mannerisms, and which left their stamp on the decorative art of the Moslems ; it also appeared to me that a detailed and comparative study of the main features of the various styles, an analysis of their orthographical peculiarities was needed without which no scientific study of the subject could be complete.

I found myself therefore in the uncomfortable position of having to decide between writing a whole treatise on the subject, covering all its sides, or merely emphasising the points to which sufficient justice had not been done by previous writers on the subject, while at the same time giving the readers of the *Visva-Bharati Quarterly* a general idea of the character and history of Moslem calligraphy. The nature of my engagement, however, left me only the second alternative and I

had to be content with the lack of compactness and proportion which may strike the reader as he reads these pages, and of which I am only too aware.

But even in this present form as the articles appeared in the *Quarterly*, they were received with so much appreciation by some kind readers, qualified to pronounce on the subject, that I was encouraged to publish these as a separate booklet in their original order.

I should be ungrateful if I did not acknowledge the debt that I owe to the numerous scholars who by their researches had made the field of work comparatively so easy to traverse, and but for whose collections of original specimens and photographs I should have been unable to illustrate the subject as profusely as I have done. I have quoted them wherever necessary.

M. ZIAUDDIN

*Santiniketan.*

*7 September, 1936.*

My pen works miracles, and rightly enough is the *form*  
of my words proud of its superiority over its *meaning*.  
To each of the curves of my letters the heavenly vault  
confesses its bondage in slavery, and the value of each  
of my strokes is eternity itself

MIR 'ALI.





## TABLE OF CONTENTS

FOREWORD . . . . .	
INTRODUCTION . . . . .	1—15
KUFIC . . . . .	16—28
THE POSITION OF A CALLIGRAPHIST . . . . .	27—44
NASKH AND OTHER STYLES . . . . .	45—71

## LIST OF PLATES

A PORTRAIT OF A MOROCCAN CALLIGRAPHIST BY E. DINET . . . . .	29
FRONT PAGE OF THE GULISTAN BY MIR 'ALI . . . . .	30
A PANEL OF MODERN NASTA'LIQ BY MUHAMMAD YA'QUB KHAN . . . . .	33
A PANEL OF MODERN NASTA'LIQ BY 'ATA MUHAMMAD . . . . .	34
A PANEL BY 'IMAD AL-HUSAINI . . . . .	41
A PANEL BY AQA 'ABD UR-RASHID . . . . .	42
A SPECIMEN OF THE EARLY NASKH . . . . .	46
A PANEL IN DECORATIVE NASKH BY 'ABDULLAH TABBAKH . . . . .	61
A PANEL IN NASKH BY ABDULLAH TABBAKH . . . . .	62



## ISLAMIC CALLIGRAPHY

OF all the arts that Moslems cultivated, calligraphy is, without doubt, the most refined. Writing ■ decorative art ■ practised by any people with such conscientious devotion as the Arabs gave it; ■ did this art ever develop such an amazing variety of styles and expressions ■ it did among the people of Persia. These peoples valued written words ■ dearly than they did precious stones. To them the art of penmanship ■ superior to ■ other arts. Such ■ the lure of the line that from the monarch down to the humblest of writers, each vied with the other in writing beautifully. A calligraphist of repute ■ the artist whom people loved and honoured most and kings felt proud of possessing in their kingdom.

Moslems, so eager to avoid the painting and modelling of human figures, ( there was ■ injunction of the Prophet to that effect, ■ it is commonly supposed), lest they relapse into their old ways of worshipping idols, the terror of which crime had been driven deep into their hearts by the thundering warnings of the Koran, devoted all their love and artistic ingenuity to the pious work of copying the Holy Word. A few of these copies that have survived from the early centuries of the Moslem era, are in themselves such idols of perfect rhythm and beauty that they leave the beholder inarticulate with admiration.

Islam, like some other great religions, appeared in the world ■ magic force of Art. It gave ■ mighty impetus to the creative faculties of those who came under its sway. It welded tribes into ■ nation and set the imagination of ■ aflame. Important centres of culture like Mekka, Medina, Kufa, Damascus, Baghdad and Baara, etc., sprang up and worked like luminous melting pots where the remnants of ancient cultures ■ brought together and made to cohere into a brighter unity. The culture that later came to be distinguished as Islamic was the product of this fusion, and the language of art that ■ developed contained in it ■ the essential elements of pre-Islamic classical cultures.

Of the arts that ■ thus developed, the most remarkable became ■ decorative arts, amongst which the one that received its most

characteristic development at the hands of the Moslems the art of calligraphy. It begun and carried in its early stages by the Arabs, but received its highest fulfilment at the hands of the Persians. The book, with its beautifully written pages and finished cover, acquired such significance in the imagination of the artists that even architecture stamped with its character and the wall surfaces often finished book

The Arabs had a system of writing in pre-Islamic days. It had two styles: monumental and cursive. The cursive system known to the Beduin poet, (at any rate by sight, since the Beduins illiterate people), to whom it did not appeal beautiful, for he has compared the of death and desolation to words scribbled parchment. "... the traces of a dwelling place which I and which filled me with sorrow," sang Imru'ul-Qais, "resembled the handwriting of a book upon South Arabian palm-bast." Another poet says: "I from Ziyad like one who is bereft of reason, my legs tracing different characters, writing on the road *lam-alif*." This quick and cursive style of the old Arabic script, used soft material, like leather, palm-bast, parchment, papyrus, etc., must have existed prior to the monumental script. This latter and more developed script, used on harder material, like camel bones, especially ribs and shoulder blades, potsherds, flat white stones, wood and metals, became a great improvement in artistic effect. The Arab sense of geometrical symmetry and mathematical precision is well displayed in the execution of inscriptions wrought in this character. This style, as for example in the inscriptions of Yemen, has been admired of the most beautiful specimens of the writings of antiquity. As this style was used uniformly throughout Arabia proper, it must have been in use from very remote times.

From the point of view of adaptability to artistic use, unless I biased, the Arabic script is by far the best

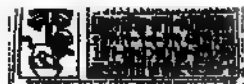


Fig. 1.

Early Himyaritic script  
a bronze tablet in bas  
relief

know of. It supplies vertical oblique strokes and lines inclinable to any degree of angle, which, when merely repeated, would produce a linear rhythm delightful to the eye. This flexibility of line and stroke put at the disposal of the calligraphist, squares, circles, ovals, cubes, and loops, entwining and interlacing shafts, manageable to almost an infinite variety of quaint proportion and graceful curvature. During the Abba-

1. *'Ajab Nāmāh*, a Volume of Oriental Studies, 1922, pp. 164, 265.

2. Ibid.

side period, the golden age of Islamic civilization, an immense number of styles of writing had developed which are extinct. It was in that age that all the possibilities of the artistic utility of the Arabic script were explored. The variability of the Arabic script and its extreme sensitiveness to artistic suggestion is indeed amazing. All the letters possess a final flourish which may be turned in any becoming curve or angle, to any suitable length, to any proportion, in harmony or in contrast with the vertical shafts standing upright at their sides, marking time, as it were, to the flow of the music of composition.

Copying the Koran was deemed an extremely meritorious act. Aurangzeb, they say, lived on the money he earned by copying the holy Text. Arthur Upham Pope observes: "The Koran was the sole way to life and salvation. Upon it depended the whole structure of society, the order of the day and the path to the future. Supernatural in origin, the final authority and standard of the good in life, it was deserving of every tribute that human skill could lavish upon it, and from the tenth to the twelfth century its pages were ornamented with such knowledge and such a feeling for splendid design that these early pages remain today almost the greatest achievement in the history of Abstract art."<sup>1</sup>

The Moslems received the tradition of calligraphic art from the ancients. In Arabia itself, as I have already mentioned, a decorative style had been in use in pre-Islamic period. The Jews and the Christians had been copying their sacred literature with love and devotion. However, Islamic calligraphy owes its development more to the impetus that it received from the Manichaeans than to any other source. Although the Syrians were the first to initiate the Moslems into the art of moulding words into graceful forms, it was the Manichaean tradition that spurred it on to artistic heights.

The followers of the artist-prophet Mani were still very much devoted to the practice of calligraphying their scriptures when the Arabs conquered Persia. Their religion was particularly bound up with art. Whereas all the other messengers of God had received only a verbal revelation from their Lord, Mani alone had been vouchsafed divine paintings in illus-

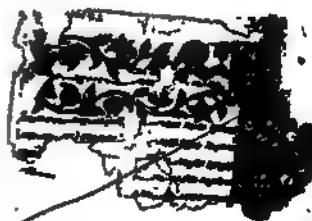


Fig. 2  
Fragment of a Manichaean page.

1. *An Introduction to the Persian Art*, 1930, p. 102.

tration of the stories revealed to him. He alone ■■■ endowed with prophecy as well as the miracle of art. When the ruling religion of Persia—Zoroastrianism—decided to save humanity from the menace of this ■■■ cult of light and shade, the revealed book ■■■ thrown into the fire before the eyes of the prophet. They say that rivulets of gold gushed out of the leaves ■ the flames licked them to ashes. In spite of successive persecutions, the followers of Mani continued to exist and they copied their literature with gorgeous illuminations. Till today the decorative splendour of the Book of Mani and the skill of his pen in tracing divine beauty ■■ proverbial in Persia. Mani had invented ■■■ script by blending the Syriac with Estrangelo. His works ■■■ written in this artistic script ( Fig. 2.).

Moslems knew the Manichaeans by the ■■■ of Zindiq. They were famous for spending lavishly ■ the reproductions of their works. An Arab author has reported an interesting controversy in which Ibrahim Sindi says sarcastically : "I should be pleased if the Zindiq were to spend less on the whitest, finest paper and the blackest ink and on the training of calligraphists, for, indeed, I do not know of ■■■ beautiful paper than that of their books, ■■ of finer writings than one sees in their books. . . ." To this the other replies: "When the Zindiqs lavish so much wealth on the decoration of their books it is like the spending of the Christians on their churches. . . ." Such works must have existed down to the fifth century of the Moslem era. Dr. Stein discovered a Manichaean manuscript at Turfan, in Central Asia, regarding which Professor A. von Le Coq writes that it is "written in the clear unequivocal letters of the Manichaean alphabet . . . beautiful and clear."<sup>1</sup> What ■■ must particularly note is that this writing contains the punctuation mark, "the characteristic sign hitherto exclusively observed in Manichaean, namely, one ■ two black dots surrounded by little circles or ovals executed in red lead or vermillion."<sup>2</sup> In the earliest copies of the Koran a single ■■■ of the Text ■■■ marked by ■ single circle ; a group of five verses ■■■ marked by a circle with ■ point at the top, usually in red.<sup>4</sup>

While the traditions and conventions of many peoples ■■■ at the back of the Moslem art, what was peculiarly Islamic in it ■■■ its lyrical character. In lyricism lay the individuality of the Moslem art.

1. Islamic Civilization, Khuda Bakhsh, Vol. I. p. 101.

2. Serindia, Vol. II, p. 819, plate, CLX II ; JRAS, 1911, p. 277.

3. Ibid., p. 278.

4. Encyclopaedia of Islam, vol. 1. p. 383, 384.

Pure Persian art of the Achaemenid and the Sasanid periods, as Mr. Roger Fry has observed, is devoid of lyrical element.<sup>1</sup> It seems, with the spread of Islam, a phase of romantic mood passed ■■■ Persia. What can be ■■■ lyrical than Persian poetry and the Nasta'liq calligraphy of the Moslem Persia?

As I have mentioned, ornament is the speciality of the Moslem art, and, among their ornamental schemes, calligraphy has claimed their best attention. As in all other Moslem countries, ■■ also in Egypt, "no art has been so much honoured or ■■ assiduously cultivated," remarks Thomas Arnold, "as that of calligraphy. Whether in architecture or in the minor arts of domestic ornament, the highly decorative Arabic script ■■■ applied to all materials used, stone, plaster, wood, metal, ceramics, glass, textiles, etc."<sup>2</sup>

A line of calligraphic decoration, like ■ painting, stands in perfect harmony with its background. Its adaptability ■■■■ its fitness with the surrounding scheme and gives it grace and life. On the other hand, its abstract nature calls for ■■■ greater artistic skill than is perhaps necessary in the case of painting pictures. In a painting, say of a beautiful lady, the artist can count on the co-operation of the beholder, who is familiar with the image in life and easily recognises in it life, grace and movement. In calligraphy the lines in themselves have to be so supple and round in form and graceful in movement that they must give the impression of being alive to the sight. Lines must move with grace and rhythm, while each of the curves and strokes keeps its balance in perfect poise. Thus rhythm, movement and grace have to be produced, not by reproducing the objects that possess them in actual life but by realising them in lines abstracted from those objects. Lines have to be sensitive and soulful, and, ■■ it were, capable of muscular response to the slightest touch. In ancient Egyptian hieroglyphs, in which letters are mostly represented by natural objects, like hawk, vulture, duck, fly, man, etc., the beauty of the penmanship lies in the graceful outlines of the natural objects themselves. A mere glance at such a writing, for example the ■■■ inscribed ■■ the ebony chair found in the tomb of Queen Hetep-Heres,<sup>3</sup> reveals the source of the artistic effect in the beautiful drawing of the objects which stand for letters. In the calligraphy of the Arabic script, however, the entire effect has to

1. The Exhibition of the Persian Art, Burlington House, 1931, Intr. p. XVIII.

■ The Art of Egypt, edited by ■■ E. Denison Ross, 1931, p. 72.

3. Ibid. p. 116, fig. 2, Plate 4.



be achieved by the movement and poise of the lines, made, as it were, of the stuff of grace itself.

It has been observed that calligraphy has a subtle affinity with human and floral forms which gives it a remarkable adaptability to

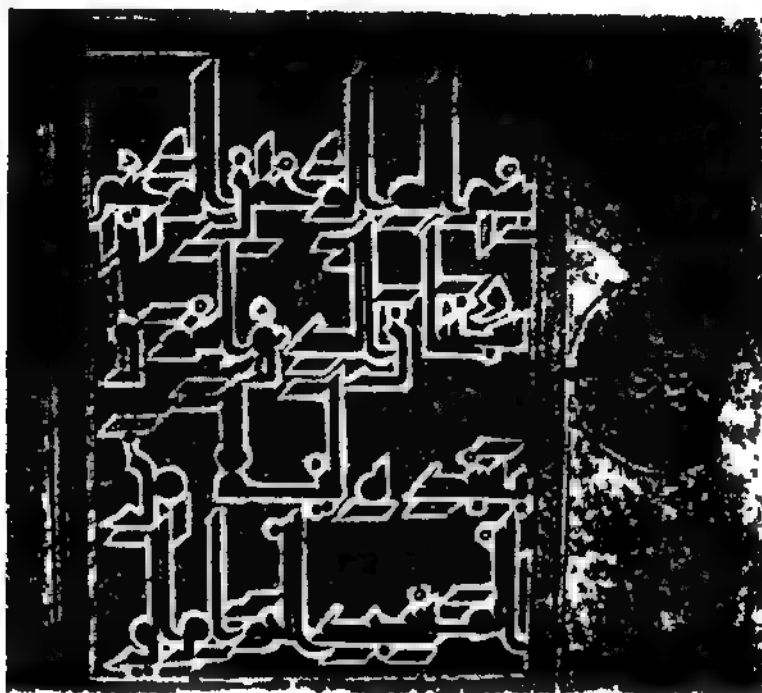


Fig. 11

A Kufic page monument in Kufic by Abu Bakr of Ghazna, 566 A H

pictorial rhythm. Mr. Roger Fry, comparing Chinese calligraphy with that of the Persians, remarks: "In this respect the fact that Chinese and Persian scripts are based on a much more free and flowing rhythm [than the Roman,] is of great importance since it enables the painter and decorative artists to combine calligraphy with pictorial forms in a single work of art. And in both countries alike we find this constant intermingling of script and painting. Perhaps in the matter of freedom and flow we must give the palm to the Arabic script, on account of its greater continuity. . . . And we find," he further observes, "both in miniature and pottery painting, the happiest and most unexpected effects produced by the incorporation of inscriptions in the pictorial or decorative designs. Even in their architecture . . . these inscrip-

## INTRODUCTION

tions play a great part. Nothing, I think, is so typical of the subtlety and ingenuity of the Persian genius than this peculiar interweaving of pictorial and literary elements through the special possibilities of the Arabic script. The practice is to show how important a position system of *linear rhythm* held in the aesthetic sensibility of Persian artists.<sup>1</sup>

The calligraphist studies the flow of lines, their proportions and positions with a view to the rhythm he intends to impart to the given

surface. The rhythmic harmony of strokes in patterns of various patterns is studied with the mental vision of a composer of music (figs 8, 4, 5). Letters appear to the calligraphist as so many notes of music, and he sits to work out melodies out of them. A good painter is always a calligraphist. It is therefore not surprising, "that the lines with which the Persian painters outlined their human and animal figures express movement with an easy control and economy which is the envy of the Western artist."

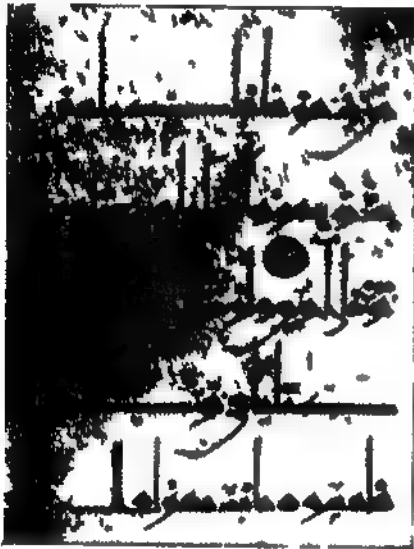


Fig. 4

A Koran page in Kufic 1st century preserved  
in Toledo Museum of Art

from Moslems, calligraphic decoration was so conspicuous. So great was the charm of the Arabic script as an ornament, that the Christian king Offa of Mercia (757-96) had his coin stamped with the Moslem religious formula in Kufic. Another remarkable instance is the Irish bronze-gilt cross, of about the 9th century A.D., which has the word *bismillah* inscribed in the middle of it in Kufic. "In neither case," observes A. H. Christie, "can the workers have realized the significance of the strange writing they copied or adopted, for inscriptions so flagrantly

Among the ornamental designs that Europe borrowed

1. Persian Art by Sir E. Danson Ross p. 34

■ An Introduction to the Persian Art p. XIX

■ The Legacy of Islam pp. 106, 113, 114

Muhammadan could hardly have been ■ knowingly upon ■ coinage of a Christian king, ■ inserted on a sacred emblem."<sup>1</sup> In ■ Italian



Fig. 5

painting—the Resurrection of Lazarus, in the Arena Chapel ■ Padua—the right shoulder of the figure of Christ bears ■ lace, decorated with an imitation of Kufic. Fra Angelico and Fra Lippo had a particular weakness for the Arabic script and employed ■ even for sleeves of the Virgin and the borders of her robe.<sup>2</sup> Not only the decorative script, but other "ornamental details derived from

Moslem ■ became increasingly numerous in craft works wrought ■ Christian Europe."<sup>3</sup>

The art of Arab penmanship, like the other branches of their culture, reached its zenith of perfection in Spain. Their greatest achievement in architecture and architectural decorative art is seen in the palaces of Alhambra (figs. 6, 7). Even in ruins there is nothing in the world to be compared with them. "Its value for the history of art is incalculable. . . . Alhambra is unique," remarks J. Strzygowsky.<sup>4</sup> The delicate filigree work, the bewilderingly intricate tracery ■ the brilliant mosaic with superbly beautiful Kufic and other styles of calligraphic writings cut in relief, geometrically intricated bands in arabesques, which pleasantly confuse the observer with kaleidoscopic delusion, letters lengthening in intertwining shafts in profusion of beauty like water from a gay fountain, writings encircled by thickly clustering leaves waving on almost trembling twigs, reveal the standard of excellence that Spain had reached under the Moors. Pitchers placed in ■ niches of archs have beautiful ■ written on them. One of them reads : "Incomparable is this basin ! Allah, the

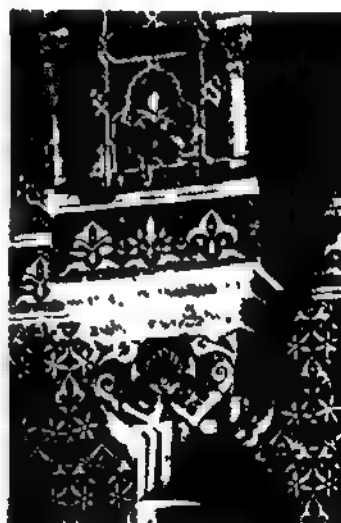


Fig. 6.  
Alhambra, Capital and ornaments

1. The Legacy of Islam, 1931, p. 114.

■ Ibid, p. 154.

3. Ibid, p. 114.

4. Encyclopædia of Islam, vol. I, p. 278.

exalted one, desired that it should surpass every thing in wonderful beauty." Such pitchers placed in niches and inscribed with calligraphic writings ■ ■ speciality of the Alhambra. "None ■ powerful ■ God" ■ the phrase that one faces on all sides of the walls of the Alhambra.

In Spain, ■ in Persia, blue and vermillion colours ■ most lavishly used in mosques and palaces. Very often the whole surface ■ coloured red ■ blue and then worked ■ in various hues. When the ground surface ■ red, the writing and other floral and linear designs ■ painted blue, black, green and yellow. The single tombstone left in Spain (Alhambra) is painted blue and the writing is done in gold. As in the main features of the decorative plans of architecture, the schemes of



Fig. 7.

Alhambra, a window.

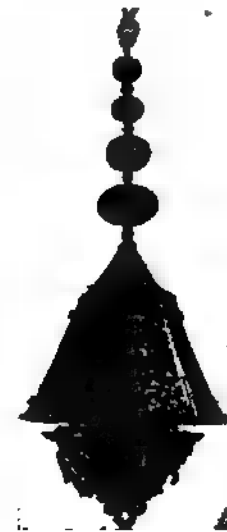


Fig. 8.

A mosque lamp (Granada)

colour too appear to have been borrowed from the illuminations of books. Wall surfaces ■ divided into rectangular panels with raised margins, and either completely covered with intricate stucco work or glazed tiles, ■ with brilliant mosaic faience. The whole surface from top to bottom ■ ablaze with the grandeur of colours. The deep blue ■ red ■ the favourite ground colour; golden yellow, white, black, emerald green and turquoise lined the decorations. The Kufic ■ Naakhi in white ■ gold ■ deepest blue gave ■ effect which can not be described ■ so many words. Referring to the glazed ceramics and their decorative motifs, Dr. Pope writes: "Arabesque and stellate medallions, stately personages ■ gay, galloping cavaliers, lordly Kufic, ■ Kufic as delicate as stucco cadenzas, rendered ■ gold and cobalt, green, turquoise, maroon and black, ■ all ■ into the loveliest of compositions. Theme and material, colour and pattern are as unified ■ ■ gracious ■ a sonnet."<sup>1</sup>

1. Studio, Jan. 1931. p. 14

Arabs developed a very high standard in the craft of leather tanning and that of making parchments. To Kufa belongs the credit of discovering methods of tanning leather. After tanning the leather parchment membrane, they dyed it in silver and gold and polished it to such a degree it reflected the face of the observer like a mirror. The writing executed in vermilion, green, black or blue. The ink they made has not yet been successfully imitated in Europe. Books lavishly decorated with gold and silver and times inlaid with jewels.

The Arabic script, both in its simple and intricate ornamental forms, charmed the eye like magic. It was imitated as arabesque and supplied pure calligraphic motifs the decoration of churches and shrines in Italy, Spain and France. And thus, quite unknowingly, as Mr. S. P. Scott remarks in his *History of the Moorish Empire in Europe* [Vol. III, ch. 29.], verses of the Koran quoted on church walls in Kufic. He remarks, quoting a French author, that the lofty gate of the most important church of St. Peter was decorated with the Moslem confession of faith in Arabic script. Obviously, the script must have in it something of the universal appeal to the artistic nature of man, for, otherwise, Christians would not have allowed this Ara-



Fig. 10

bic script to enter their sanctuaries. In spite of such a catholic appreciation that calligraphy inspired, Mr. E. Herzfeld makes a strange remark: "It is undoubtedly an expression of a certain bigotry on the part of the Muslims, that they inscribe nearly every article of artistic craftsmanship with verses from the Koran."



Fig. 11

Mihrab of the Jam'i mosque at Fatehpur Sikri, 1556-1605 A. D., the architrave is painted deep blue, sculptured with verses from the Koran in Naskh, overlaid in gold

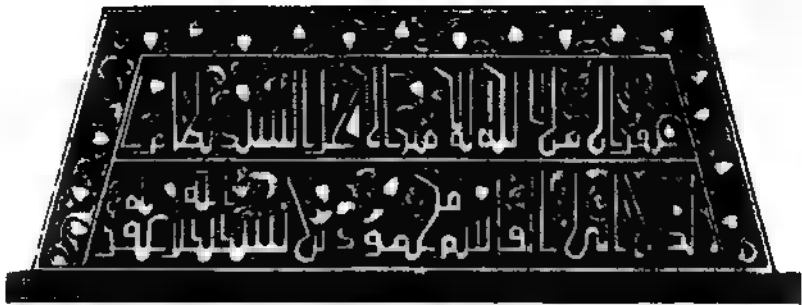


Fig. 11

The inscription in stylized Kufic on the tomb of Mahmud of Ghazni

Koran. . . .” Out of such inscriptions, he is ready to accept certain inscriptions “with gratitude because of their historical importance.”<sup>1</sup> Otherwise such writings appear to him “rather a peculiarly decorative . . . of the characters . . .” which . . . “the confession of faith . . . with innumerable, sometimes rather pointless, formulas of blessing . . . congratulations. . . .”<sup>2</sup> The formula of the confession of the



Fig. 12

Kufic inscription in plaster relief, with an undercurrent of spiral stalks—on the mihrab of the Mosque of Yahya bin Abul Qasim, 543/1148, at Mosul. The . . . of the calligraphist is signed as Mustapha Baghdadi.

Moslem faith, which . . . a few letters contains the whole of Islam, is, naturally, very important to a Moslem. This confession, when abbreviated to its initial letters is summed up in letters, L. A. M. (the three letters with which the Koran begins are A.L.M.)

These three letters have been used as architectural motifs of decoration with incomparable ingenuity of designs. As symbol of faith few Moslems would be able to recognize their confession of faith in these three letters, but men of all faiths would undoubtedly find them beautiful. Mr. E. Herzfeld admits, however, that the decorative value of these letters lies in “their rhythmical and symmetrical shape.”<sup>4</sup> Furthermore, ignoring the calligraphic value of such decorations, he

1. Encyclopaedia of Islam, Vol I, p. 364.

2. Ibid, p. 364.

3. Ibid, p. 365.

4. Ibid, p. 365.



Fig. 13.



Fig. 14.



Fig. 15.

Fig. 16.

Floated Kufic decorations from lustred plates.

observes with regret that these letters, "the nature of which has been completely misunderstood, are found in objects made by non-Moslem artisans especially in Western imitation of Arab works of art."<sup>1</sup> Later in this decorative writing "developed into a particular kind of linear ornament," he remarks, "in which all consciousness of the original nature of the letters is lost."<sup>2</sup> This is bound to take place. The peculiarity of the Arab mind lies in its tendency to abstract the qualities of Nature and give them an independent form. They abstracted the linear rhythm of their calligraphy and applied the new rhythmical elements thus gained to their arabesque.

After the extermination of the Moors from Spain, Moslem builders sought to build churches and shrines. They were not paid for their labour, but, in return, were exempted from the poll tax. These Moslem builders must be to a great extent responsible for the style that Christian architecture developed and also for the introduction of the calligraphic motifs.<sup>3</sup> For it was actually after the fall of the Moslem rule in Spain that Christian architecture came into existence. "The Muhammadans," writes Mr. Owen Jones, "very early in their history, formed and perfected a style of art peculiarly their own. .



Fig. 17.

Anatolian lamp, XVI century.



Fig. 18.

Cup with decorative Kufic, XII-XIII centuries, Ray

1. Ibid, p. 365.

2. Ibid, p. 365.

3. The Legacy of Islam, p. 13.

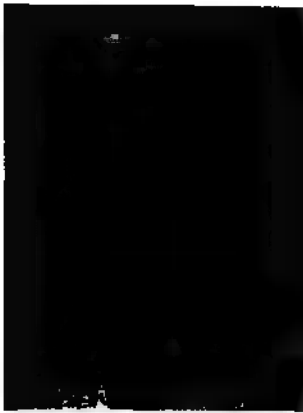


Fig. 19.

Mihrab, with Kufic and Naskhi inscriptions in mosaic faience, XIV century, Persia.

Westminster Abbey and also in certain stained-glass windows to be the result of the influence of Moslem calligraphy on English decorative art. 3

While we possess relics of Moslem arts of all the countries that were or were under Moslem rule, Spain alone has an almost blank page. Libraries, mosques, palaces, baths, and indeed all the main and minor products of art were destroyed by Christian barbarians of Spain with a thor-



Fig. 21.

Baghdad silk, X-XI century, with Kufic writing in arch bands, woven in red, yellow, black and white.

It can hardly be said that Christianity produced an architecture peculiarly its own, and entirely freed from traces of paganism, until the twelfth or thirteenth century."<sup>1</sup> "The carved inscriptions used decoratively in late Gothic work," writes Mr. M. S. Briggs, "were anticipated in the ninth century at Ibn Tulun's mosque at Cairo, but inscriptions in Kufic characters penetrated far into France during the Moslem occupation of her southern provinces, and many examples of ornament in England are believed to show Arabic influence."<sup>2</sup> Prof. Lethaby considers the bands of ornament as the retablo of



Fig. 20.

Painted ivory box XIII century.

oughness unparalleled in the history of humanity. As S. P. Scott has observed, the clergy declared Arabic script to be magic formulas and Arabic works to be books on magic laws and enforced to wipe off every sign of them from Spain. And thus we have lost what must have been of the greatest value to art.<sup>4</sup> Books were hunted up, piled up in crossways and set to fire. Ferdinand IV. and Charles V. started the scheme of destroying the remains of Moslem culture in

1. *The Grammar of Ornament*, 1910, p. 57.
2. *The Legacy of Islam*, p. 178.
3. *Ibid*, p. 178, foot note.
4. *History of the Moorish Empire in Europe*, Vol. III, ch. 19th.



Spain.<sup>1</sup> Philip II. gave orders to the effect that every stone bearing Arabic writing should be broken to pieces. One may wonder how the silver-gilt-plated casket, adorned with pearls, belonging to the scholar



Fig. 22.  
An ivory casket XI century, with floriated Kufic on  
the border of the lid, in the cathedral of Pamplona.

king of Spain, Hakam II., and bearing a beautiful inscription in Kufic that invokes blessing on the owner, found its way on the high altar of the cathedral of Gerona.<sup>2</sup>

Calligraphy, like all fine arts, is beyond definition. We cannot bring out its points of beauty by analyzing it into its original components. Hence, particularly in the case of decorative calligraphy, it is difficult to understand and appreciate its complete artistic significance without referring the original to its proper setting and back-ground. Most of the illustrations used in this study are pieces of calligraphy cut off from their main body, bereft of their original colours and therefore hardly give us any exact idea of their native artistic effect. In the next section I intend to deal with only some of the various styles of the Moslem calligraphic art, namely, the Kufic, and will try to present to the readers some of the most characteristic decorative variations of this style.<sup>3</sup> The merit and the ornamental charm of each variation of the main style can be appreciated by comparing it with the others. I must also mention that I have not considered it necessary to burden the study by giving the usual chronological list of the early calligraphists. About most of them nothing is known than their names and the style they wrote in is known. Of their works nothing worth mentioning has come down to us. Moreover, much in architecture and

1. The Moors in Spain, S. Lane Poole, 5th ed, pp. 271, 273.

2. Ibid, p. 148.

3. The remaining styles are treated in two more sections in the next number of this Journal.

painting, it is difficult to determine exactly the period of the development of Kufic styles, which, ■ other styles of later periods, appear and disappear with the rise and fall ■ dynasties. Styles have evolved into different styles so slowly and imperceptibly that ■ can only refer to their dates in terms of the centuries of the reigns of certain kings.



fig. 23.

Madrasat-ul-'Attarin ( Fez ), a panel with floriated Kufic in mosaic faience.

## KUFIC

THE Kufic is the angular variety of the Arabic script, has been traced to about a hundred years before the foundation of the town Kufa ( 17/638 ), to which place the style its origin. It first in this town that this particular way of writing officially made of. This official recognition gave the style its present name. It is a hieratic script and was treated as such throughout the period it continued to be employed. For about the first five centuries the holy Koran was exclusively written in the various forms of this style (figs. 24, 25, 26, 27, 29).

For the first two centuries of the Moslem era, they were mostly the Arabs who cultivated the art of calligraphy. During this period calligraphy does not seem to have advanced beyond its



fig. 24.

Carpet with a verse from the Koran in cursive Kufic

strict use, that is, it did not evolve any purely decorative form. The Koran dated the 168 A. H. is in simple Kufic. The simple and unshakable faith of the early Moslems, which the bold and rhythmic oratory of the Koran had inspired in the proud and unbending Arab, did not consider the fickle and flowing style of writing used by the traders in towns to be at all a suitable medium for the holy Word to be couched in. The Kufic

was just the script for it; it suited in form the bold character of the revelation.



Fig. 25.



Fig. 26.



Fig. 27.

These earliest forms of the Arabic script, the cursive and the Kufic, are immediately derived from the Nabataean, which itself is ultimately traceable to the Phoenician of the eighth century B. C. It is termed Himyaritic, Himyar being the town where it was current before the advent of Islam. Some of the inscriptions in this character were adorned with animal and tree figures, done in conventional styles. The Sabaean inscriptions have, in some instances, their last letter decorated with an ornamental design.<sup>1</sup>

The Himyaritic or Sabaean writing, owing to its hardness of the

1. Indian Antiquary, Jan. 1875, p. 28

material it ■■■ written on, developed a blunt, straight ■■■ sharply angular character (fig. 28). The other ■■■



Fig. 28.

Letter of the Prophet to the "Mukaukav"  
written ■ the 7th year of the Hijra.

■■■ system, due to the soft medium it ■■ used on and also the necessity of writing quickly, developed a flowing and cursive form. This cursive style, ■ it further developed into the Arabic script, later called Naakhi, ■■ in fact used on papyrus and parchment, before the angular Kufic ■■ into existence. Historically, the Arabic script is the youngest the world has produced, but with regard to its ■■ in the world today, it is second only to the Roman.

The cursive style, when written after the Syriac model of writing, to which script the Arabic one is very closely related, developed into regular Kufic (fig. 25). The main features of the Kufic mode of writing are its vertical and oblique lines. The earlier cursive style, ■ used in pre-Islamic days, had already developed the fundamental character of the Arabic script, namely, the ligatures that joined ■■ letter to another. These connecting strokes were to prove of immense importance in their ■■ graceful ornamental flourishes. This script was, however, defective in short vowels, it had no diacritical dots to differentiate similar letters from each other. These marks it received during the 2nd century of the Moslem era.

Kufic writing ■■■ to have reached its extreme angular character by the end of the 2nd century of the Hijra. Thenceforward the rounder script begins to curb it to softer ■■■ The 3rd century Koran has rounder ■■■ and slantingly pointed tips (fig. 33). By the middle of the 4th century the Kufic gives way to the Naakhi, that is, to a little rounder script, and, more ■ less, ■■ to be employed in the copying of the Koran, though continues to be used as ornament. The Fatimid dynasty of Egypt (550/1155) made the most of the Kufic style, and practically with the passing of this dynasty, the script also fell out of ■■ and became obsolete, except in architectural and ceramic decorations. Its most fantastically ornamental forms, intertwining, interlacing, floral and geometrical, evolved during the ■■ and the 6th centuries of the Hijra.

In the beginning, ■ already mentioned, it ■■ the simple Syrian model of calligraphy that suggested to the Arabs further improve-

in their script. Diacritical dots and signs adopted after the Syriac model. This influence of the Syriac system of writing had actually begun before the advent of Islam. The vowel marks also taken from the Syriac, but these were different from those in now. They indeed the Syrian Moslems, familiar with the Syriac and Hebrew scripts, who are known to have first improved the lettering of the Arabic script. They determined the form of each letter of the Arabic script in its simple and compound form and defined its vowel marks, after the standard of the Syriac.<sup>1</sup> This step must be considered the first definite towards the development of the art of calligraphy. Different styles of Kufic developed gradually. Abul Aswad (69 A. H.), a disciple of the Kalif 'Ali, reported to have improved the calligraphy of the Koran and introduced vowel marks in the form of dots. His system was followed for about a century. His disciples improved upon his style. Qutba is the next great calligraphist who is said to have invented four styles of the Kufic. After him we hear of Khalid (96/715), who stood out foremost amongst the artists of his period. The golden inscription on the Prophet's Mosque is believed to be the work of his penmanship. He also copied the first Koran hear to have been illuminated with

signs adopted



Fig. 29.

A from the Kufic Koran on deer skin, II century of the Hijra.



Fig. 30.

gold. In the Abbaside period, with the rise of monarchy and the growth of wealth and knowledge, the profession of the calligraphist received the encouragement that art might need. Mekka, Medi-



Fig. 31.

Basra, Kufa and Baghdad, etc., their own schools of art.

Another age in the development of the Kufic calligraphy was in with Khalil bin Ahmad (170 A. H.), a grammarian, and Ali bin Kusai (182 A. H.). Improvements introduced by them have been, less, retained to the present day. Kusai was the teacher of Mamun ar-Rashid. And Mamun ar-Rashid was the first lover of the art of calligraphy who collected many specimens of good penmanship of all the various styles as could be obtained in his kingdom.

The Persians in pre-Islamic times reported to have invented different styles of writing their language. All these styles differed according to the nature of the subject matter they contained or the person they addressed to. Moslems began to have classified some of their styles according to this old custom of the Persians. Most of these styles were combinations of some or other styles of the Kufic. For example, there was Al-Jali, the bold Kufic, used in royal correspondence and monumental inscriptions. The Sijilat was the documentary Kufic. Salasi was used in letters addressed to officials and subordinates. Miftah was a style compounded of the Salasin style and the Estrangelo script. Haram was the style used in letters addressed to ladies, etc. Styles used in the calligraphy of the Koran were other than these. The Kufic reached its excellence in the calligraphist Ibn Muqla (338 A. H.), who was a renowned artist of the reign of Al-Qahir-Billah the Abbaside. He is said to have invented the five main styles that prevailed after the Kufic lost its charm for the people.



Fig. 32.

The letter, believed to be the very epistle of the Prophet that he wrote to the "Mukaukas" written in the III year of the Hijra (fig. 28), is perhaps the earliest specimen of the Arabic writing of the Moslem period. It differs from the cursive only in its stiffness and angularity. It presents the very form of the Arabic system of writing that calligraphers set to improve and beautify a few years later. A definite improvement is observable in the monuments of the period immediately following that of the Prophet. The milestone (fig. 32), marking 109 miles from Damascus, belonging to the reign of the Abdul Malik bin Marwan (65-86 A. H.), shows the marked improvement that calligraphy had gained in the previous style. Notwithstanding

the ravages of time that this mile-stone has withstood during the fourteen centuries, it has kept much of its beauty intact. Letters are no longer irregular and wayward, they stand in order and keep their proportion and symmetry of form. The whole composition gives beautiful calligraphic effect. Compared to the letter of the Prophet the writing of this stone is less angular and less stiff.

Another Kufic inscription ( fig. 33 ), engraved on marble and dated



Fig. 33-

in any of these two inscriptions.

155/771 A. D., belonging to the Mosque Al-Mahdi, is an example of the regular Kufic that had developed during the 1st and the 2nd centuries of the Moslem era, before the ornamental Kufic came into existence. The tips of the strokes, both vertical and oblique, are pointed, and, sometimes, have a flourish added to the vertical shafts. The whole composition is compact and the lettering precise ; no vowel-dots are used



Fig. 34.

Fragments of the Kufic writing on the niche of a mosque in Mosoul, dated 376 A. H.



Fig. 35.

By the first quarter of the 2nd century of the Hijra, the Arabs had their rule established beyond the western shore of the Caspian sea in the Russian territory. Some of the Kufic inscriptions discovered in Darband and Baku, by M. N. de Khanikoff, are in striking contrast to the regular style of the Kufic writings of that period.<sup>1</sup> The calligraphists there, in many instances, have definitely declined to follow the angular Kufic of Baghdad that prevailed in the then Moslem world. Their ideal was the cursive style of the papyrus. However, when this comparatively rounder style is cut in stone, it keeps neither the character of the angular Kufic nor that of the cursive. It develops an independent style which is somewhere between the two.

1. *Journal Asiatique*, 1862, p. 103.

The fac-simile of the inscription given by M. N. de Khanikoff, dated



Fig. 36.

Plaited Kufic in relief on a pretence door in the Mosque of Abul Qasim, at Mosul (543/1148).



Fig. 37.



Fig. 38.



Fig. 39.

the principle of different proportions in which vertical lines stand to the oblique and the intervening curves, and also the proportion that the breadth of the line has to its length; the unit of measure being the square dot that the pen makes with its point, without being pressed beyond its actual breadth. For instance, the long connecting

175 = 195 A. H., is in the Kufic of the ultra round style. It also bears the vowel dots. The lettering of this inscription is extremely beautiful. I am inclined to believe that the calligraphy of those inscriptions must have been deeply influenced by the then prevalent Syriac. The Syriac inscription, d 677 A. D., discovered in the cemetery of Khusrav, Persia (fig. 37), will bear witness to the intimate balance that exists between the Baku inscriptions and this Syriac writing. The letters in it are traced in their outlines, which method

also followed, sometimes in the copying of the Koran. The vowel dots that were adopted in the Arabic system from the Syriac are observable in this specimen in their original form. In the early Kufic too, as in this Syriac inscription, words are written horizontally, for which peculiarity the style was named *maqur*, i. e. walking on all fours, in the manner of the quadrupeds (compare figs. 37, 38, 39).

The principle which separates one style of the Kufic from the other of the class, is

1. Journal Asiatique, 1867, p. 103.

2. Journal Asiatique, Jan. 1885, p. 44.



links of letters give an oblong character to the style may be shortened and the words rendered square in form. The word Muhammad, which in Kufic has generally an oblong position, may be pressed into square dimensions by shortening the length of the connecting links of its letters (fig. 40).

40. I have already remarked that the Caucasus styles of Kufic are peculiar in themselves. As an example of this peculiarity I may refer to the Baku inscription dated 471 A. H. on the mosque built by Ar-Rasheed b. Muhammad b. Abi Bakr (fig. 41). The first glance at it is enough to convince us of its originality. It cannot be classed among the styles of the Kufic that are known to have existed in different parts of the Moslem world. Its letters are simple and undecorated. The distinctive feature of it lies in the irregular treatment of its vertical strokes, which are short, flat at the top or pointed and stand out like a row of irregular teeth; the oblique strokes, along with the main horizontal bases of the words are distorted so that the composition of the inscription has lost one half of the essential character of the Kufic style. The word *al-Masjid* (fig. 42) is bent in a semi-circular position. The basic lines are either tilted or given a long undulating curve.



Fig. 41.

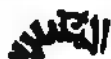


Fig. 42

The inscription dated 557 A. H., engraved on the sanctuary of Yusaf b. Kabir (fig. 43) presents another peculiarity of the Caucasian Kufic. The novelty of the style is distinctly observable in the treatment that each word of the composition receives individually. The word *Zaki*, at the end of the first line, is written in a zig-zag form. The four vertical shafts of the



Fig. 43

word (a)l-Isa(m) are joined with two horizontal lines above so that we have two triangles placed over the word sheltering roofs.

It would appear that the people of the Caucasus mountains, being



Fig. 44

Fig. 45

less cut off from the cultured provinces in the south, continued to play with the first model of the Kufic that entered their country earlier than it did any other. Though it almost ceased to be used in other countries by the end of the 10th century of the Hijra,



Vertical strokes, when they occur in succession as in the word Allah, may be written in uniform height, ■ in gradually descending order, ■ the middle ■ shorter than the two of equal height on both the sides ; ■ the middle one may be taller than the either on each side ( figs. 57, 58 ). All these shafts may also rise to equal heights, intertwine and interlace ( figs. 7, 10, 59, 65 ), or bend against each other in oval ■ ( fig. 5 ).

The stroke may be suddenly bent at any



Fig 57



58.

59.

point on its body once or more than once (fig. 60) and straightened again. These bends may be sharply angular or round. Instead of these bends the stroke might have a simple knot or two ; the knot may be



60.



61.



62.



63.

interlaced. A stroke may be written in double lines in a variety of ways, interlacing (figs 60,61,62,63) or entwining once or more than once. Strokes ■ that lie apart from each other, the oblique ■ or curves intervening them, may also be brought to interlace each other once or ■ than once.

Vertical strokes may also be so joined together at the top that they form a horizontal rafter over the word, and may be ■ into geometrical or floral figures. This arrangement divides words



65

into compartments, and the triangles hanging from the horizontal bar above give the impression of chandeliers. Such compartments may be ornamented with wheeling twigs and swaying leaves with graceful sweeps from ■ compartment of the word to the other (figs. 10, 34, 23, 53, 65).

The oblique line is also treated in the same way. It primarily





Fig. 67.



Fig. 68.

Fig. 69.



Fig. 70.

the purpose of joining two letters together and also forms part of of the letters of the Arabic alphabet. It may be simply doubled, twisted once or than and, in case it forms a separate letter, may end in a leaf, a loop or any proportionate geometrical figure. These oblique shafts may also interlace or entwine in various ways as shown in figures above



Fig. 71.

The square, oval or circle also forms part of some letters. It may be written in any decorative form which does not completely change the character of the stroke, may also have extra flourishes and may be drawn in lines entwining each other.



Fig. 72.

Every kind of line, especially the vertical one, may broaden and blossom into any floral form or terminate in an animal or, though very rarely, in a human face (fig. 53), may be executed in the form of capital of pillar with spiral corners (fig. ).

The Chinese seal pattern proved such that often the lattice work of screen, cut in marble, wood or plaster was worked

in the Kufic in most ingenious manners. In this triangular Kufic vertical and oblique lines are woven into each other in fret-work (figs. 73, 74, 75).



Fig 73.

in side by side with the Kufic was developed by calligraphists and termed the Naakh, the subject of our next section.<sup>1</sup>

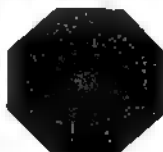


Fig 74.



Fig 75.

1. I have reproduced with gratitude some of the details given by Mr. S. Flury of Kufic inscriptions of Ki-imkazi Mosque (Zanzibar), his in JRAS, April, .

## THE POSITION ■■■ A CALLIGRAPHIST

BEFORE ■■■ proceed to discuss the other styles of Calligraphy, it ■■■ to ■■■ desirable that ■ few words should be said on the position of ■ calligraphist and his art in the Moslem Society.

In the days of the Abbasides, with the introduction of paper, ■ and the spread of culture among the masses, the institution of education and the art of book production gained supreme importance. What ■■■ then called *warāqat*, consisted of the profession of transcribing manuscripts, of book-binding, gilding and the business of selling books. *Warāqat* flourished ■ ■■ honourable pursuit for literary men and scholars of every description. The great demand for quick work in the copying of books had produced a class ■ prolific scribes who combined the merit of speed with that of ■ beautiful hand-writing and were specially called *warraq*. The learned ■ well ■ the officers of the government employed them ■ secretaries and amanuenses.

In those days the publication of a book ■■ an event of great social importance. It meant business to the calligraphist ■■ class, reputation to the author with ■ hope of immortality and enrichment of knowledge to students. An author either delivered his work ■■ lecture from the pulpit of ■ mosque, or read out from his notes with commentary in extempore, while scribes and students dispersed among the audience noted down his words with incredible speed. Dictation ( *imla* ) ran for days, months, even years, according to the extent of the thesis.<sup>3</sup> Scribes then compared their texts with each other, and corrected their copies according to the one certified by the author as correct and reliable. These texts were then copied again and sold in the book-market. Authors wrote scores of volumes and it is difficult to believe today how they managed to write single handed such encyclopaedic works ■■ they have produced.<sup>4</sup>

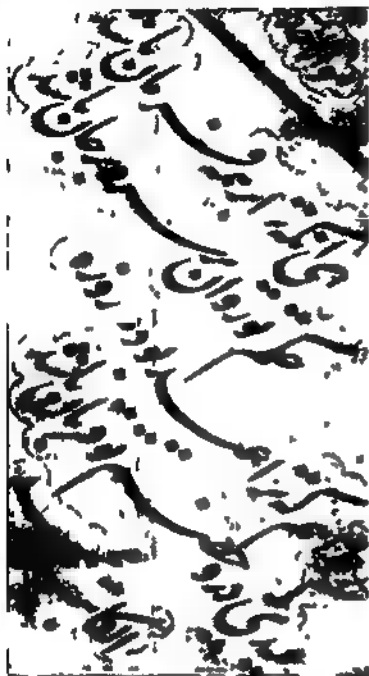
1. *Fihrist*, p. 32.

2. *Ibid*, p. 169 ; ■■ *Khaldun*, Cairo, I, pp. 349, 350, 351.

3. *Ibn Khallikan*, II, p. 228; *Fihrist*, p. ■■

4. *Ibid.*, I, p. ■■ ; *Nafkhat-Tib*, II, p. 884.

Authors had no rights of royalty in their works. Once broadcasted among students and scribes and through them to the world, the author lost every connection with his work. Any body



**FIG. 76.**

■ panel of Nasta'liq calligraphy by Pir Muhammad (Kala-Bhavan Museum, Santiniketan).

could copy and sell ■ ■ his ■ ■ property. There ■ ■ a time when misappropriation of authorship was ■ ■ Authors, in order to ■ ■ their authorship, took the precaution of mentioning their name in full in the text, as many times ■ ■ they could manage. Poorer authors wrote their works, copied them and sold them at the door of their house or by auction in the streets of the town.<sup>1</sup>

Book-shops generally clustered round the principal mosque of the locality and formed the book-market. Baghdad had about three hundred bookshops. Bookshops were the principal resort of the learned. Book-sellers being generally scholars and authors of repute were the centres of attraction for all seekers of knowledge. Here in the midst of polished and gilded manuscripts squatted the respectable and

the learned and discussed poetry and religion till midnight.

Speed in the transcription of a text was a matter of keen contest between scribes. The calligraphist of the court of the prince Bayasanghar reported to have written three thousand lines of poetry in one day and night. During the time he was performing the feat, hundreds of people had gathered round the palace at Mashed, and drums were being beaten in full fury to stir up the excitement on the occasion created.<sup>2</sup> Yahya bin Adi was such a good hand that he could write one hundred lines in twenty-four hours.<sup>3</sup>

1. Ibn Khallikan, I, p. 62.

■ *Tazkirat-i-Khushnawisān*, p. 47.

Tarikhul-Hukama, 369



Fig. 77.

Portrait of a ■ calligraphist, by F Duet



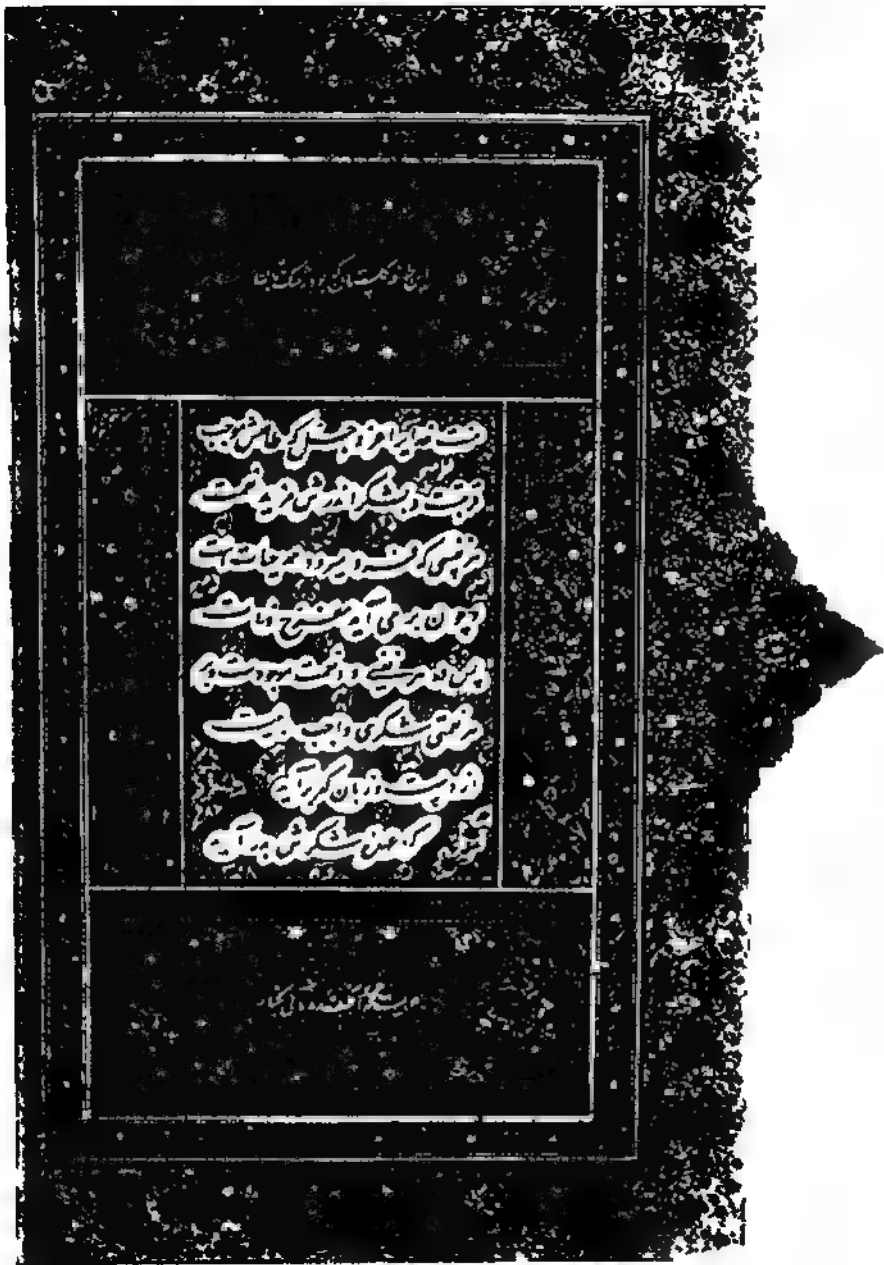


Fig 78

Front page of the *Gubatan* of Sa'di, calligraphed by Mir 'Ali for 'Abdul 'Aziz of Bukhara, in 550/1543 ( *Monuments et Mémoires*, 1918—1919 p 189, Pl. XV, fringes have been, unfortunately, omitted by the block-maker)

The profession of a copyist being fairly profitable, literary men and scholars adopted it. Normally, their daily income through copying saleable books was three to four rupees.<sup>1</sup> They also employed in libraries for transcribing books and paid regular remuneration. They appointed teachers, most reputed among them being selected for instructing princes, princesses and of nobles. Often a prince had more than one teacher in calligraphy, each being in charge of the particular kind of hand he specialized in. Calligraphists were given charge of libraries where their duty was to supervise the work of subordinate scribes engaged in copying books and look to the quality of their handwriting. Remuneration of a scribe depended on the quality of his hand, the average of his mistakes and his speed. Mullah Muhammad Amin of Kashan, the superintendent of the library of 'Abdur Rahim Khan Khanan ( who was a remarkable penman himself ), was paid a monthly salary of four thousand rupees.<sup>2</sup> But the Khan Khanan's liberality was proverbial ; most of his artists enjoyed *jagir* too. In the library of Banu 'Aminar, at Tripoli, one hundred and eighty scribes worked, of whom a group of thirty could always be at work day and night.<sup>3</sup> In the royal library of Bayasanghar, who was a calligraphist himself, forty scribes worked under the supervision of Maulana Ja'far.<sup>4</sup>

Scribes were very often scholars of recognised status and while they served as copyists they could do their own creative work too. For example, Ibn Sa'id was a copyist of Waqidi and has written a stupendous biography of the Prophet.<sup>5</sup>

Every nation, at the height of its culture, has given proofs of its love for knowledge by founding public schools and libraries, but with Moslems the desire had amounted almost to madness. Nothing satisfied their vanity so much as the number of books in their libraries. Books were often written at the request of Kalifs and nobles who paid huge amounts of money for their labour. Mansur the Andalusian had received five thousand coins of gold for his *Fusus*.<sup>6</sup> Part of a Kalif's palace was always a library. Princes, courtiers, nobles and the rich gloried with the scholars in possessing

1. Yaqut, III, pp. 85, refer also to p. 105.

2. Islamic Culture, Oct., 1931, p. 627.

3. Transactions of the 7th A. I. O. Conference, 1933, p. 1032.

4. Tazkira-i-Khushnawisan, p. 45.

5. Fihrist, p. 145.

6. Nafkhat-Tib, II, p. 728.

manuscripts in their libraries. palace of a library as well as the debate house of empire where of talent of all religions and nationalities brought together to solve religious and intellectual problems, with the king their president.

Adjoining the halls of the library were studios where hundreds of calligraphists copied books, while painters illustrated them with mini-

atures, binders bound them in leather and gilders and illuminators finished them as pieces of artistic production. Scribes often grouped into separate according to subjects of their transcription. The calligraphists of the Koran were grouped together and so were the copyists of books on tradition, biography, history, law and medicine, etc. Some of them were appointed to go through the copied manuscripts and add short vowels and diacritical marks.<sup>1</sup>

Never was there a great demand for beautifully written manuscripts as in those days of the Abbasides. The standard and the style

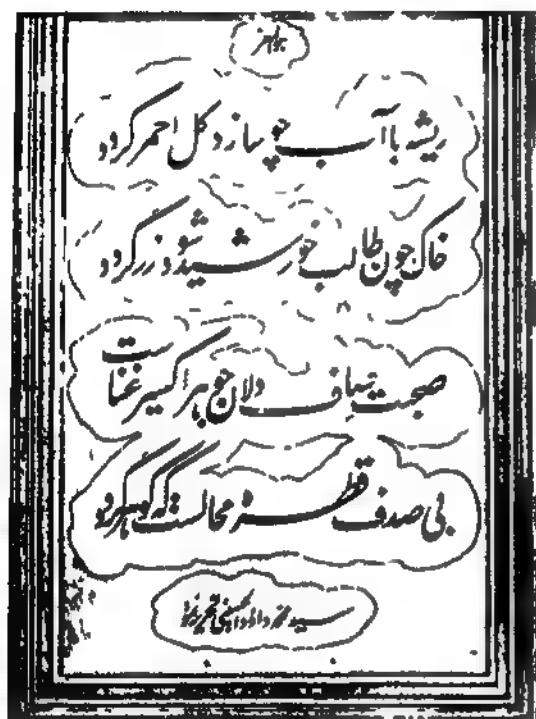


Fig. 29

A beautiful and delicate specimen of Nasta'liq calligraphy by Sayyid Muhammad Baidil Hussain of Kibal

set up by the Kalifs followed by their subjects. And most of the profit accruing on the pious work of educating the and of collecting libraries for public or private use, went to the class of the calligraphists.

The amount of work the scribes had hand in Capital towns of the empire is not possible to guess. Yet an idea may

1. Ibn Khallikan II, p. 334. T. Athiba, II, p. 234—236, Almagrizi Khitat, I., pp. 458, Yaqut, V, p. 447. Khaldun, IV, 146, Ibn Khallikan, I, 144



Fig 80

A panel of modern Nasta'liq calligraphy, by Muhammad  
Ya'qub of [redacted]

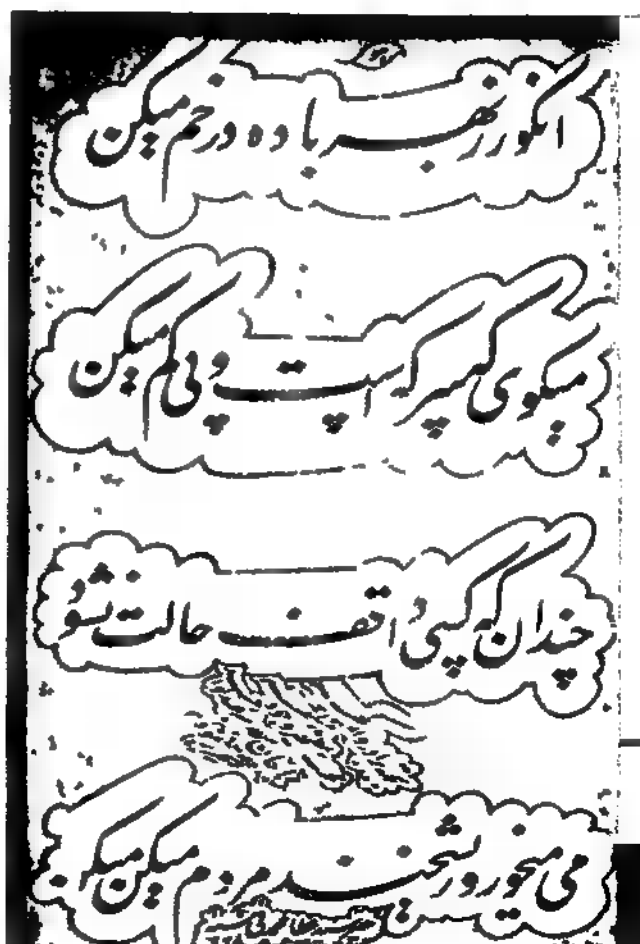


Fig. 81.

A panel of modern calligraphy, by Sayyad 'Ata  
Muhammad of Kabul

be formed of ■■■ briskness of their business by looking over the number of books that ■■■ of the libraries are recorded to have ■■■ tained. Harunar-Rashid's library ■■ Baghdad, called *Baitul-Hikmat*, ■■■ is, "The Abode of Wisdom," contained ten hundred thousand books. To this library ■■■ also attached a department for translation in which scholars translated books from the Indian and Greek languages into Arabic. These translations ■■■ weighed in gold and the amount paid to the translators ■■ wages.<sup>1</sup> It had separate ■■■ for calligraphists. This library was plundered by the Moghals. The library of Shapur bin Ardshir, the minister of Bahaud-Daulah, contained ten thousand manuscripts. This ■■■ ■■■ burnt to ashes by Tughril Baig in 447 A. H.<sup>2</sup> In Egypt 'Aziz ■■■ had collected sixteen hundred thousand works ( ■■■ A. H.). These ■■■ destroyed by Kurds.<sup>3</sup> The Fatimid library at Tripoli, founded by Banu 'Ammar, ■■■ the biggest that Moslems ■■■ collected. It contained thirty hundred thousand books. It ■■■ destroyed by Christian crusaders in 502 A. H. + Granada had seventeen big and hundred and twenty small schools which had libraries attached to them, comprising four hundred thousand books. Eighty libraries were open for public use day and night. The royal library at Cordova occupied a whole palace

Those who could afford sent agents to different countries for buying and copying books. Faizi had his agents in Persia. Hunain bin Ishaq had his agents in Roman countries who bought or copied for him books in Greek sciences and arts.<sup>5</sup> The monthly salaries he paid to his translators alone amounted to £250.<sup>6</sup> Muhammad bin 'Abdul Malik paid £1000 monthly to his translators. Hakam II, the Spanish king, was a great lover of books. "Never had so learned a prince reigned in Spain," writes Prof. R. Dozy, "and although all his predecessors had been men of culture, who loved to enrich their libraries, none of them had sought so eagerly for rare and precious books. At Cairo, Baghdad, Damascus and Alexandria, Hakam had agents who copied or bought for him—grudging no cost—ancient and modern manuscripts. With these treasures his place overflowed, on all sides,

1. Fihrist, p. 243; Abul-Faraj, p. 146
2. Ibn Asir, II, p. 145. Yaqut, I, p. 799.
3. Khaldun, IV, p. 81.
4. Gibbon's Roman Empire, VII, p. 505.
5. There was a regular profession of book agents or brokers of book, who were called *Dallāl al-Kutub*, Ibn Khallikan, I, p. 63.
6. *Tabaqat ul-Atibba*, I, p. 187; Fihrist, p. 243.

too, were to be seen copyists, binders, and illuminators." : And this description would also hold true for most of the houses of the literati and the rich of those days.

The standard of literacy at Baghdad was higher than that at Granada, Cordova or Nishapur. The annual expenditure of the Nizamiyyah school at Baghdad, where education was imparted free, was six hundred thousand *dinars* ( £ 800,000 ). : Here education was also open among women. Among the slave girls of Zubaida, the wife of Harunar-Rashid, there were a hundred that had had proper education. 3 According to Dr. Sprenger's estimate, the number of such outstanding personalities among scholars whose lives have been recorded in biographical works ( the *Rijāl* ) is about five hundred thousand. 4 The number of ordinary literate men and women must be, therefore, about a thousand times greater. While most of the literate people strove to acquire a good handwriting, an equipment very commonly desired by Moslems, how keen must have been the competition among calligraphists and how high the standard of excellence in penmanship ?

Professional artists of various branches of arts and crafts had to learn calligraphy which formed part of their decorative schemes. The gold-smith, the jeweller, the copper-and iron-smiths, the seal engraver, the wood and stone engravers and the potters were often experts in several styles of calligraphy, and they wrought their wares with inscriptions that gladdened the heart of a calligraphist.

Among innumerable scribes, the calligraphist was one who specially devoted himself to developing penmanship as an art in itself. And they were always the selected few. They copied works not so much for reproducing a text as for writing it beautifully. They displayed their art on panels of paper, called *ruṣṣī*, which fetched them handsome price. These panels were papers, mounted on card-boards containing a poem, generally a quatrain, in bold hand, very often illuminated ; these were bought by lovers of art as works of art and students of calligraphy kept them as models for exercise.

The work of a calligraphist was always costly and greatly prized by admirers. Five hundred pounds for a book of four hundred pages was not a rare price. These artists pursued their profession with a

1. Spanish Islam, R. Dozy, II, 454; see Al-Maqrizi, I, p. 408.

2. Sirajul-Muluk, p. 267.

3. Abul-Mahasin, I, p. 632

4. Mazasin-i-Shibli, p. 35.



Fig. 82.

Bronze chandelier inlaid with silver with the name of Qasr Bay, inscriptions are in decorative Nasta'liq XV century (Victoria and Albert Museum)

Bronze incense burner inlaid with silver bearing the name of Muhammad Ibn Qasim the inscriptions are in decorative Shikasta XIV century (Victoria & Albert Museum)

devotion almost ascetic and imposed on themselves strict discipline. We often read that such and such a calligraphist never omitted his daily exercise of writing a few pages till the very day he expired. They ■ in fact revered ■ their society ■ saints and were often ■ of strong moral purity and religious character.

Ghulam Muhammad, Haft Qalami (i.e. 'the master of seven styles') was particularly keen on visiting calligraphists personally. His meeting with another calligraphist and the love with which they talked about their profession should be of interest here. The Haft Qalami, ■ hearing the fame of Hafiz Nurullah, went to ■ him. Even on his first visit he found him extremely well-mannered, unassuming, just ■ absolutely devoid of pride. "The Hafiz," writes the Haft Qalami, "showed me his papers of exercise. ■ had, by then, transcribed the *Haft-band-i-Kashī*, ■ the request of Asafud Daula Bahadur. How



would I put in words the miracle ■ Hafiz had performed with ■ pen ? It ■ verily a garden in ■ blossom ! No body would ■ satisfied by looking ■ it. A long time passed in looking ■ ■ joying these papers . . . without any exaggeration I may say that this noble heart, notwithstanding the greatness he has attained in his art, has no pride whatsoever. . . ."

They then talked of Shahjahanabad, and the Hafiz asked : "I have heard, Sir, that you have brought with yourself the calligraphy of Aqa 'Abdur Rashid. Would you be indeed ■ kind ■ to allow me to illuminate my eyes by having a look at them ?" Next time the Haft Qalami took the specimens of the Aqa's writing with him. "The

Hafiz ■ extremely delighted by seeing both the bold and the fine varieties of the Aqa's penmanship. From morning till after the noon he looked at them. . . ."

Their art absorbed all their attention and they were generally respected by all, alike by kings and the people. And calligraphists, too, ■ well aware of their importance, and were not always so very humble and unassuming ■ the Haft Qalami found the Hafiz to be. A few examples illustrative of the honour they enjoyed would not be out of place here.

Mir Khalilullah Shah ■ greatly honoured in his days. He copied the 'Nau-Ras with great ■ and made a present of it to Ibrahim 'Adil Shah, the king of the Deccan. The King ■ extremely pleased with the gift and the accomplish-

ment of the artist. He bestowed ■ him the title of "The king of the pen", and as a mark of extraordinary honour made him sit ■ his throne. After this ceremony was over, he bade his courtiers to ■ pany him to ■ residence.<sup>2</sup>



Fig. 84.

■ specimen showing how an artist practices strokes and curves, by 'Abdur Rahman of Herat.

1. Tazkira-i-Khushnawisan, pp. 45, 46.

2. Ibid, pp. 79, 80.

The Haft Qalami writes an admirer of Khalilullah Shah's calligraphy wanted to buy some of his papers for hundred rupees, but the owner would not sell. After much haggling the bargain was struck for an Arabian horse. The customer procured one and bought the papers.<sup>1</sup>

Yaqut Musta'sami (1203 A. D.) has been considered the greatest of Naskh writers. His reputation was so great that even in his lifetime books copied by him had spread the Moslem world. Each of his copies of the dictionary *al-jauhari* sold at hundred *dinars* (£ 50).<sup>2</sup> He copied the *Shafa* of Avicenna and sent the to Muhammad Tughlaq (1324 A.D.) in India. The King appreciated the work greatly and sent to the calligraphist a gift of two hundred million *misqals* of gold in return. But the artist refused the gift considering it beneath his dignity to accept such a meagre sum.<sup>3</sup>



Fig. 85.

A panel of Mir 'Imad's Nasta'liq calligraphy

Mir 'Imad al-Husaini of Qazwin, the unapproachable master of the Nasta'liq style almost a martyr to the pride he had in his talent. He cared little for the money and honour that lavished on him so abundantly. Shah 'Abbas Safawi (1587-1629 A.D.) asked him to copy the *Shah-Namah* of Firdausi, that stupendous epic, and along with the request he sent him the meagre sum of seventy *tumans*. After the lapse of a year, the king sent for the book. Mir 'Imad handed the messenger seventy lines from the beginning of the book, and told the messenger that for the gift of the Shah this all he could offer. This remark offended the king, who sent back those seventy lines to the calligraphist, and demanded his gold back. The Mir

up to the occasion again. He took a pair of scissors and neatly cut those lines into seventy pieces. Each piece he gave to a disciple of his, who went home and brought back a *tuman* with him. Mir 'Imad then counted up seventy *tumans* in the palm of the messenger. He

1. Ibid, p. 81.

2. Ibn Khallikan, p. 207.

3. Les Calligraphes et les Miniaturistes, Heurt, p. 85.

■■■ murdered shortly after this event, in 1616 A. D. ; ■■■ crime is said to have been committed at ■■■ instigation of the king himself.<sup>1</sup>

Mir 'Imad's calligraphy was very much admired by Shah Jahan. He gave the title of *Yak-sa'at* (centurion) to every one who presented him a specimen of his writing.<sup>2</sup>

Among the last of the great penmen the work of Aqa 'Abdur-Rashid ■■■ most dearly valued by ■■■ lovers of the art. He ■■■ ■■ cousin and a student of Mir 'Imad. He ■■■ to India in Shah Jahan's time and ■■■ appointed a teacher to the prince Dara Shikoh, whom he instructed in the Nasta'liq style. Most of his life he passed at Akbarabad and ■■■ also buried there after his death. His calligraphy came to be so highly valued and so rare that those who possessed specimens were afraid of exhibiting them, lest they lose them.

The name of a renowned calligraphist meant money to forgers and they have exploited some great names, in particular the students of renowned artists. For example, a pupil of Aqa 'Abdur-Rashid, named Amir Razwi, imitated his style and signed his ■■■ writings by the Aqa's name. The Haft Qalami remarks, it required ■ very careful examination to decide which ■■ which. The death anniversary of Aqa 'Abdur-Rashid was regularly observed in the month of Muharram, at Akbarabad. Calligraphists of all the important towns in the neighbourhood, specially those of Delhi, attended it, and benefited by exchanging their views on their art and other professional matters. A more lively gathering, however, was held ■■ the fourth of every month at the house of Shah Waris 'Ali. He was ■ good calligraphist and specialized in the decorative style called *Gulzar* and also in the Shikasta hand. He was ■ lively soul and by ■■ means over religious. In the monthly meetings that ■■■ held at his place, he entertained his visitors with music and dance by dancing girls. The Haft Qalami says that this meeting ■■■ always a great ■■■■ Shah Waris 'Ali died in 1227 A. H.<sup>3</sup>

Maulana Khawja Muhammad too had the ■■■ habit of signing his writings by the name of his master, the celebrated artist Mullah Mir 'Ali. Few People could detect the difference. His master ■■■ ■■■ of the havoc his student had done and was still doing. He has complained of this misfortune of his ■■ ■■ poem, wherein he says :

1. Tazkirah-i-Khushnavisan, pp. 9', 9".

■ Ibid, p. 93.

3. Ibid, p. 131.

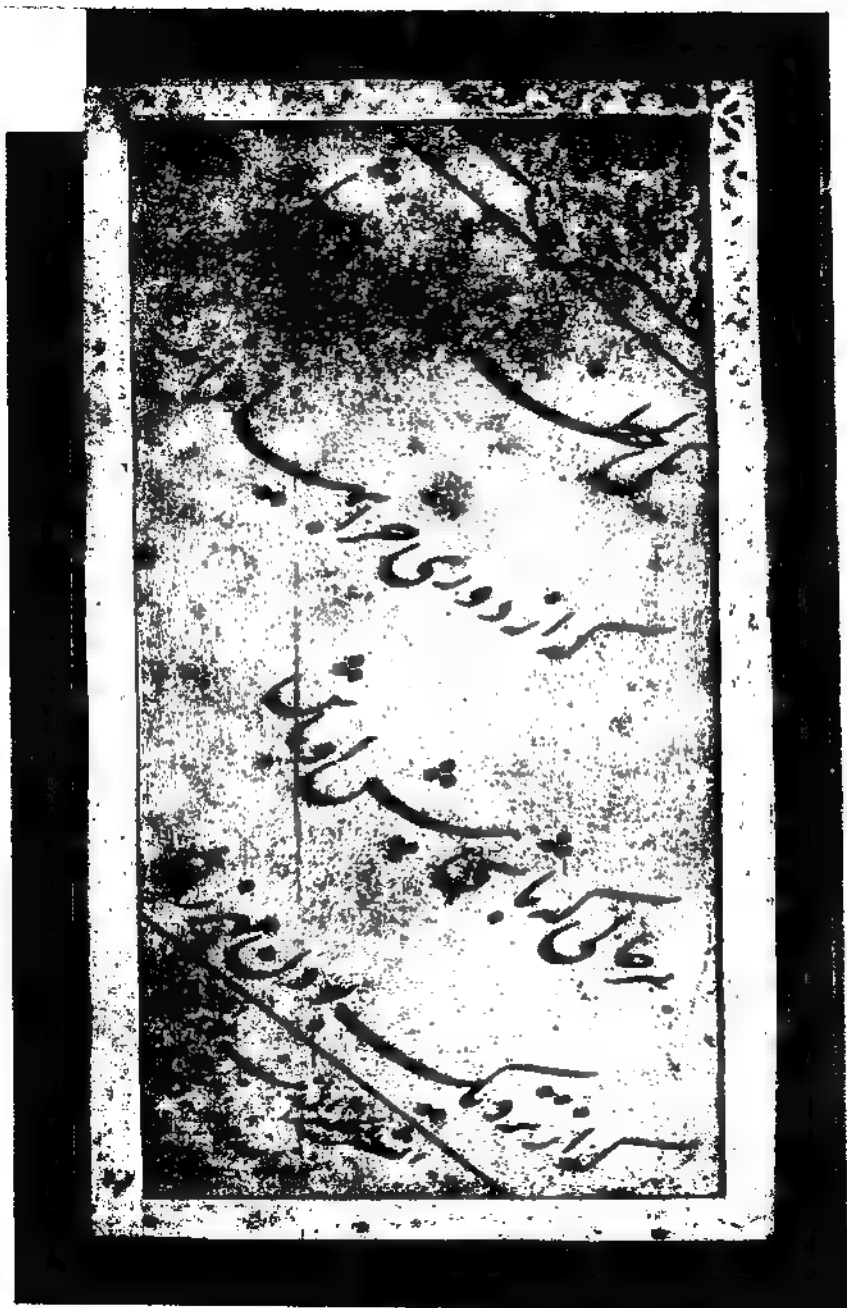


Fig. 86.

■ panel of the calligraphy of the celebrated 'Imad al-Husaini ■ Qazwin  
( reproduced with gratitude from ■ ■ Review of April 1936 ).



Fig 97

An extraordinarily beautiful specimen of Aqa Abdur Rashid's calligraphy  
(reproduced with gratitude from the Moslem Review)

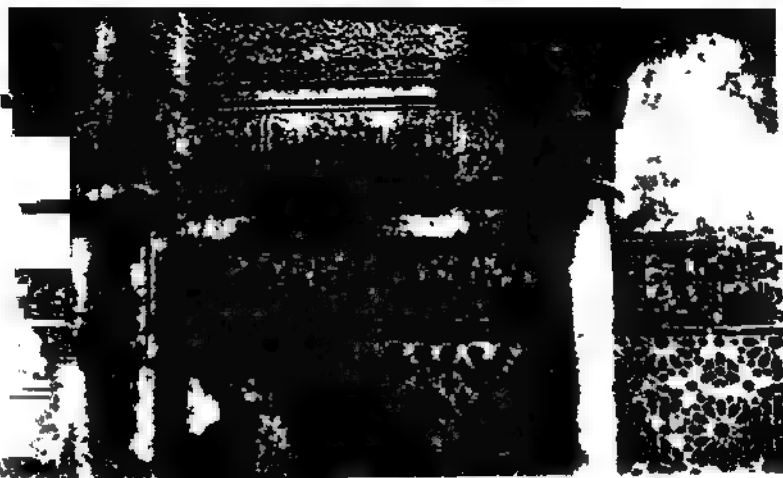


Fig. 48

A band of inscription in the decorative Suls of the western variety, in mosaic faience. Masjid al Attarin, Fez



Fig. 49

Architrave of the Masjid al Shakh, Isfahan. The inscription in the decorative Nayeh style, done in mosaic faience.

"Khawjah Mahamud — my disciple for sometime, and I tried my best to instruct him, till his handwriting developed a feature. I have done him — wrong, — does he do — any, — that he writes good — — best he can and signs the — in my name."

Jahangir — an admirer of Mullah Mir 'Ali's hand ; the Mir himself — conscious of his talents and he has made no secret of it. In his poems he has often referred to the superiority of his art. A poem of his, of which I give a translation here, is remarkable in the — that it describes that subtle point in the art of calligraphy where it touches pure art :

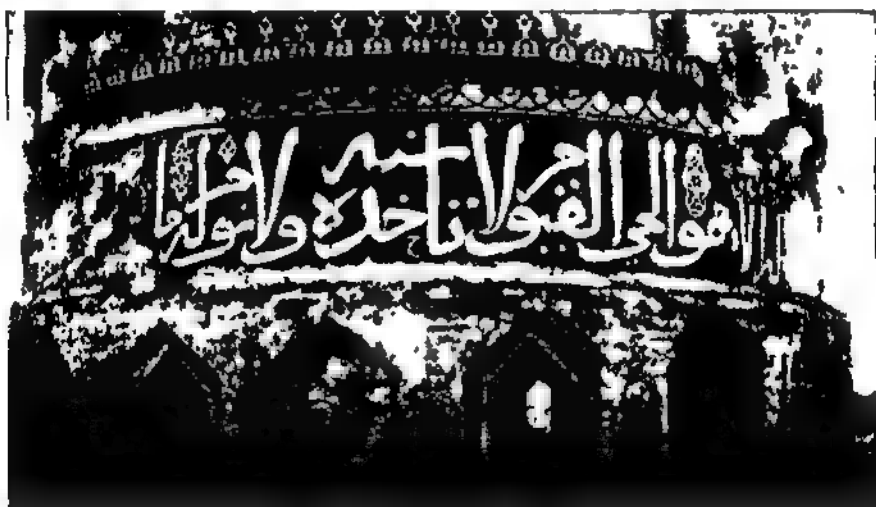


Fig. —

Mausoleum of Princess Tughai ( d 1349 ), the drum of its dome, with the inscription in Sule style of the Western variety, in — faience, Cairo.

"My pen works miracles, and rightly enough is the *form* of my words proud of its superiority — *meaning*. To each of the curves of my letters — heavenly vault confesses its bondage in slavery, and the value of each of my strokes — eternity itself."<sup>2</sup>

1. *Tazkira-i Khushnawisan*, p. 80.

2. *Ibid*, p. 52

## NASKH AND OTHER STYLES

OF the two main off-shoots or elementary styles of the original Arabic script, viz. **Kufic** and the angular, the latter, because of its monumental character, **was** to be selected **as** the preferred script of the government. And, in obedience to the general tendency in art during the period of Arab predominance, the calligraphist too tried his best to bring out its ornamental possibilities. This script, that is, the angular Kufic, had absorbed the attention of the artists to the almost complete neglect of the cursive variety, until in its progress on ornamental lines, it departed so far away from its original structure that it failed to **fulfil** its primary purpose **as** the script of **a** language.

In the meanwhile, the common cursive variety of the Kufic continued to be used for common and less artistic purposes—for the copying of books of common **use** and correspondence, where lack of embellishment **was** not of much consequence. After about three centuries of monopoly as the preferred script of the Moslem world, the Kufic lost its ground. For about two centuries more it was used, almost exclusively, for ornamental purposes and then became obsolete. The round variety, which had been developing unnoticed, under the long shadow of the lordly Kufic, came to be recognised as the script of the State. It **was** given the distinctive **name** of Naskh. It had incorporated into itself all those orthographical improvements that had been worked out in the Kufic, and appeared **on** the stage of art fully dressed with vowel-marks, punctuation and diacritical signs.

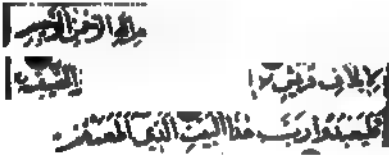
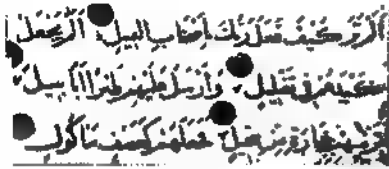
The advent of the Naskh style brought in **a** important period of renaissance in the history of Moslem calligraphy. So far the Kufic had been mostly cultivated not **so** much for its own sake **as** for the decorative scheme to which it lent **itself** **so** easily. The script had been **merely** subservient to **a** ulterior motive, the decoration of a surface. With the Naskh appeared the tendency to realize the grace latent in the script itself; that is, the writing, and not the ornamental rhythm it could display, became the object of calligraphy. It **was** realized, in strong reaction to the ornamental Kufic, **that** the artist must remain



الْأَخْرُصُونَ فَلِئَلَّا  
تُخْجَعُوا إِلَى الْبَالِغَةِ فَلَوْ شَاءَ  
لَمَدَّ فُكْرُكُمْ أَجْمَعِينَ  
قُلْ عَلَى اللَّهِ شَهِدَ أَكْثَرُ  
الَّذِينَ يَشْهَدُونَ أَنَّ  
اللَّهَ حَرَّمَ مَعَاذًا قَبْلَ  
بَشَائِصِهِ أَفَلَا

faithful to the genuine features of the script ; he must not violate the original form of his script.

But ■ script has ■ original character inasmuch as it is not a natural object. One ■ never be sure of being quite faithful to the original form, which form, if it ■ at the moment of its birth, has been lost beyond recovery. A script is an invention of man, an artificial ■ of expressing an idea ; a purely intellectual contrivance. This, however, does not ■ to be the view the calligraphist holds ■ the matter. To him his script is a living thing and, ■ such, though it undergoes changes ■ it grows and becomes ■ and ■ aged, it always has ■ features, peculiar to its age, which are its genuine features and people know it by those features. The calligraphist watches its growth in the hands of the people. And to this living medium of his art he wishes to remain faithful. And yet, ■ the artist ■ to simply copy the script ■ he has received it from the hands of the ■ he would not be faithful



A ■ from ■ Koran MS of the XIII century

ful to his profession, and would not be doing his job. He must make the writing look beautiful. To attain this purpose he must change, however slightly, the proportions of strokes and ■ that go to make the features of his script.

This the calligraphist does by taking into account the tendencies ■ working towards the gradual change of the script and by taking into confidence the fancy of his readers. That is, he changes the forms of his letters after their liking. He follows the way the ■ of his readers are ■ to appreciate. By modifying the form ■ letters he makes them simpler of execution. He changes angles into rounder ■ and lets strokes follow the natural sweep of the hand. Thus, while the identity ■ the letter is not lost, the writing is made easier, ■ to the ■ of the readers and beautiful. In

bringing about a change of this nature, the calligraphist depends upon the change of the proportion of **■** and strokes than on any thing else. By changing these proportions he gives different expressions to letters without interfering with the outlines of their anatomy, their orthography.



Fig. 93.  
Naskh inscription carved at  
Mustansiriyyah, Baghdad

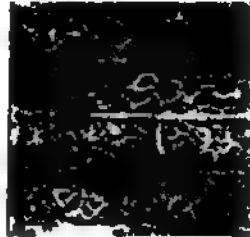


Fig. 94.  
Naskh inscription carved  
in stone, Baghdad



Fig. 95  
Fragment of a Naskh  
inscription carved in  
stone, Baghdad



Fig. 96  
Naskh inscription at Khan Artmah,  
Baghdad

Through a gradual change in the artistic **■** well **■** the utilitarian improvement of the script, scores of **■** styles developed. Most of them **■** lost as they did not develop into styles of any marked distinction and stable value, **■** because they **■** products of pure fancy and served **■** useful purpose. Many of them were nothing **■** than ingenious, and their ornamental merits did not suit the utility

of art. It **■** this defect which had proved suicidal in the **■** of the ornamental Kufic. The calligraphist **■** risked his **■** that way again. For the display of ingenuity **■** ornamental fancy, he **■** to take **■** to certain styles **■** were **■** apart for this purpose, viz. the Gulzar, the Tughra, the Ta'us **■** the Zulf-i-'urus, etc. From the Kufic down to Nasta'liq—the latest and the simplest **■** styles—the tendency **■** been from the complicated and angular **■** the more

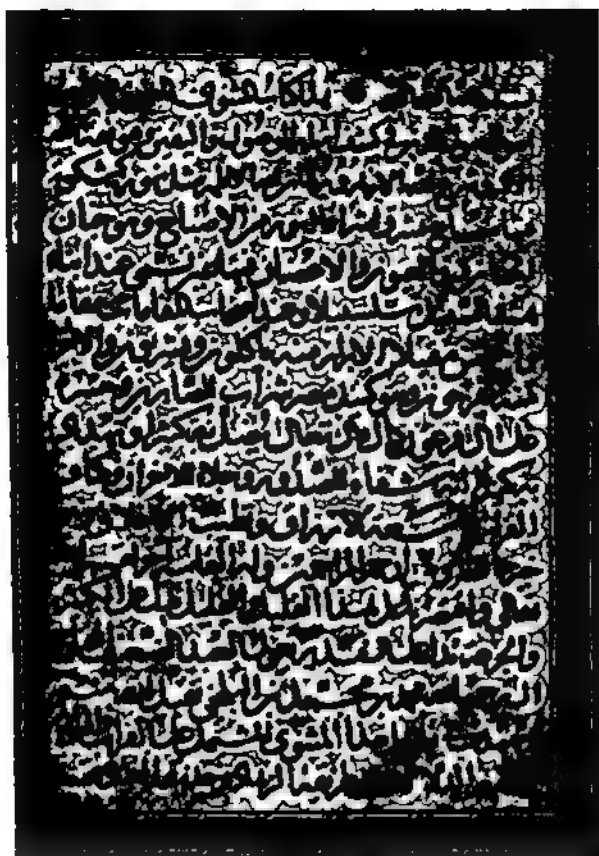


Fig. 97.

A page from the *Masnawi* of Jalaluddin Rumi, in decorative Naskh, XV century, Persia

round. Only in the special ornamental and monumental styles the calligraphist indulges in ingenuity and complication.

The ideal of a calligraphist, like of adepts in other arts, was to express emotion, which he strove to realize through the medium of the linear rhythm his script capable of producing. While every man and woman can walk, only a few of them walk elegantly; any one might write but few make letters dance with grace.

The charm of a calligraphic writing is contained in the structure of strokes and which aim producing a graceful movement instinct with universal appeal. A painter by study



Fig 98

Calligraphic drawing of a Persian lady XV century, Persia

expressions portrays in human faces joy, grief, anger, peace, ■ disgust by making use of certain lines that are suggestive of such emotions. A line, by its nature, is symbolic of ■ movement, of ■ particular rhythm abstracted from ■ natural object ■ A calligraphist selects a particular kind of line which he feels would produce the desired suggestion. His ■ depends upon the successful execution of ■ theme of his rhythm. Styles ■ calligraphy ■ from each other ■ ■ styles of rhythm they convey

Calligraphists succeeded so much in catching the spirit ■ the rhythm of life in their writing ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ painters, particularly of the fifteenth century, adopted the technique of the calligraphist for their art.



Fig. 99

and seems to be full with the property of life. A line of this or a similar description has been defined by Mr. Huges as ■ 'beauty-line'; and a calligraphist selects this kind of line for his writing. The example of the 'beauty line' that Mr. Huges has given is similar to the two lines ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ning horizontally in the middle of the plate shown above (Fig. 99).

This drawing on a glazed plate is calligraphic inasmuch as it symbolizes the rhythm of the growth of ■ luxuriant plant. It represents the dance of vegetable life, the dream of a plant. Lines used in this drawing are similar to those used in the ink-drawing of ■ Persian lady (Fig. 98). They suggest, apart from their

In ■ human drawing of calligraphic nature (Fig. 98), lines ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ suggestive of ■ joyous play of the moulding outlines of the human body. Without taking the help of shades, ■ line by gradually growing to a suitable breadth towards the centre, in the form of ■ muscle or a muscle fibre, suggests the roundness of ■ limb



Fig. ■ ■ ■ ■ ■  
Shikasta-amir style, calligraphed by  
S. Muhammad Da'ud al-Husaini.

subject, ■ particular rhythm of life, ■ ■ ■ ■ less abstract way of representing ■ emotion. The beauty and the rhythm that a calligraphist strives to realize is similar to these drawings but much ■ abstract in subject.

Dr. Upham Pope, rightly ascribing to calligraphy the perfection that ink-drawing had attained in Persia, observes: ". . . The Persians'

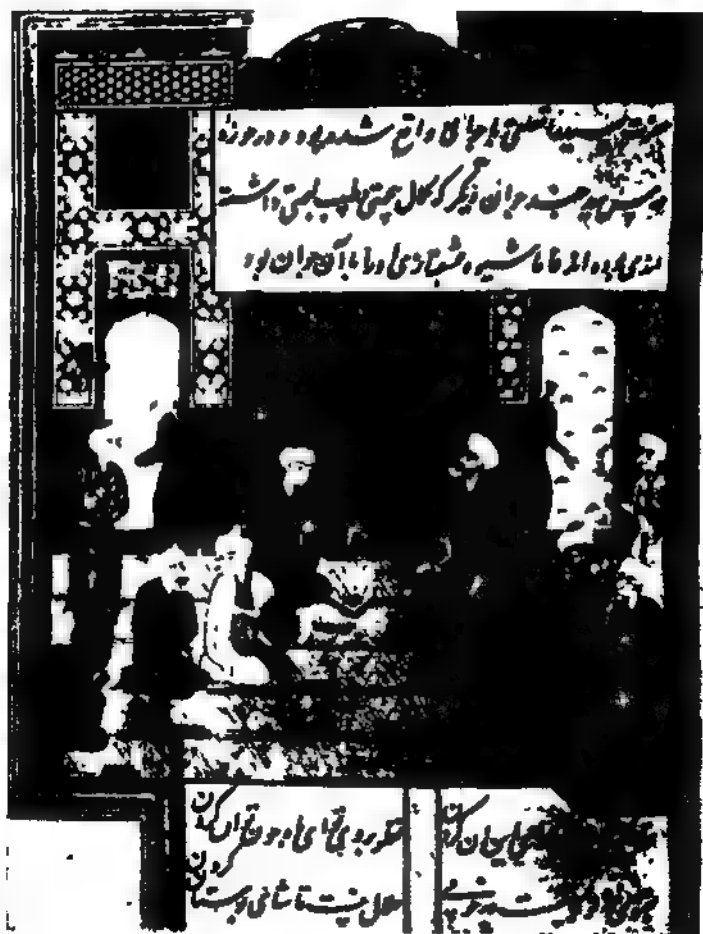


Fig. 101.

love for finesse and their enthusiasm for technical elegance, their long-disciplined and instructed ■ ■ ■ ■ for ■ ■ ■ flowing line learned from calligraphy, were among ■ ■ ■ several influences that converged to carry the ■ ■ ■ of drawing ■ ■ ■ very high rank. . . . Some of the ■ ■ ■ ■ century drawings of ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ school are essentially compositions in calli-



Fig. 102.

graphic strokes, and each line ■ endowed with ■ lovely and expressive grace that could only have been the product of ■ sophisticated passion for calligraphy.”<sup>1</sup>

Another factor which ■ must take into account is the influence of the Chinese and the Manichæan or the Central-Asian art on both the calligraphy and painting of Persia. In Central-Asian art line-drawing of calligraphic style had reached its perfection, long before ■ Persians began to experiment in it. Such drawings appear in Persia with the invasions of Mongols and Turks. These people were

1. An Introduction to Persian Art, p 115





Fig. 103.

An ivory panel carved with a Naskh inscription XV century, Cairo.

familiar with the Chinese ink-drawings in Buddhist temples, and also with Chinese calligraphy done in frescoes ■ temple walls, ■ silk and

porcelain. China silk and porcelain, however, had entered Persia earlier than the invasions of the Mongols.<sup>1</sup>

To return to calligraphy proper, I wish to point out that apart from the main styles that developed ■ off-shoots of Naskh, every master, in whatever style he wrote, had an individual style of his own. As ■ student of calligraphy strove to imitate his model, his practice, in case he ■ talent, developed into an improved style. Such individual artists provide us with innumerable styles within styles, infinite shades of ■ tion and qualities. It is often difficult to detect such individual variations. While ■ may feel them ■ is not always possible to lay our finger ■ the subtle distinctions.

In order to develop a particular trait in his style, an artist makes ■ most of ■ energies ■ physical and mental. He might



Fig. 104.

A model of Nasta'liq calligraphy, by Sham-suddin; crescent circles of two adjoining words ■ into one.

makes ■ most of ■ energies ■ physical and mental. He might

1. *Islamic Culture*, Jan. 1931, p. 40; Oct. ■ 64.

strive to make his handwriting firm and bold, expressive of strength, rough, or austere, exquisitely delicate, graceful and sweet. Whatever be the nature of the conscious attempt of the artist in bringing out a particular shade of character, it may be admitted that most of his distinctive qualities are the result of the stress his subconscious mind puts on his art. His peculiarities reflect his personality, his mental character, which discipline and practice bring out in fine shades. It is extremely difficult to point out such mental qualities of a writing with any degree of precision, much less to analyze them. Analysis of the handwriting of a master would amount to the analysis of his mind which is always baffling.



Fig. 105.

A model for exercise in Nasta'liq calligraphy, by Shamsuddin, showing the symmetrical arrangement of similar strokes.

Today we do not possess that passion which older generations had for a good handwriting; and we have no idea what amount of labour is required in mastering a stroke that might pass as fairly good. Consequently, we do not possess any real criterion with which we might be able to judge a work of calligraphy. We lack that sympathy which comes through practical acquaintance with the art. We might greatly admire a writing but our admiration is bound to be superficial, because it is of the uninitiated in the art. We cannot but overlook many good points of merit which persons touch with the pen alone reveal.

The Naskh style holds a position between Kufic and Nasta'liq. The Naskh retains, however slightly, the suggestion of its angular origin; its curves are never perfectly round or oval which

the peculiarity of the Nasta'liq. stages which Naskh passed in its development towards Nasta'liq, are marked by such styles Suls, and Riqa'. The Naskh in represents the cursive Kufic softened to broader curves and freer sweeps. Fragments of the papyri published in the *Archiv Orientali* for Oct. 1935, will a glance convince that what called Naskh in fact the cursive variety of the Kufic in its developed form. It usurped the hieratic position of the Kufic and has retained it since then. The Koran is written in Nasta'liq hand. Nasta'liq is peculiar to the Persian and the Indian. Naskh is mostly used by Arabic speaking people.



Fig. 106

Gilt and enamelled glass mosque lamp, with Naskh inscription in white (upper) and blue (below), XIV century.

Naskh developed different forms in different countries.

The one known generally as Maghribi, i. e. 'the Western', is the earliest variety and

is drawn directly from the Kufic of the century A. H., independent of the later Naskh styles. This Maghribi variety of the Arabic script, originally known as Qairwani, Qairwan being the of the capital of the Aghlabids (800-909 A. D.). This town the centre of the then civilized Africa and from here this first Naskh or the first variation of the cursive Kufic spread in its neighbourhood.<sup>1</sup>



Fig. 107.

Mihrab inscription done in stucco, in of the Ayyubide period, Sinjar.

It varies from the Eastern Naskh, as the example (fig. 108 | given below, would show, in the proportion of its circles that are wider in circumference, with slanting strokes flung swiftly as in Shikasta.

1. Khaldun, I. 350-3.



Fig. 108.  
The Qairwani style.

In Spain another form of the Naskh, called Andalusian or Cardovan, came into existence. It was rounder in its curves than the Qairwani. Inscriptions on the walls of Alhambra, excluding the Kufic,



Fig. 109.  
The Andalusian Naskh.

are written in the monumental Andalusian style ( figs. 6, 7, 8, 109 ). It flourished till the fall of the Almohades in Spain.<sup>1</sup>

Fez evolved its Fasi style which is still rounder than the Algerian variety of the Naskh ( figs. 23, 88, 110 ). In central Africa, at Timbaktu appeared a style called Sudani. Its letters are large and thick, round or angular. The Tunisian and the Algerian styles did



Fig. 110.  
Fasi of the 14th century A. D. from a  
frieze on the door of a Moroccan home.

not differ from the general Western style in any remarkable degree. Although the Western style is the earliest departure from the Kufic, its oldest example dates only about 300/900 A. D.

The earliest inscription in Nasta'liq is probably that of the "Persian Deed for Sale of Land" discovered by Dr. Hoernle,

1. Ibid. I. p. 751.

published by D. S. Margoliouth.<sup>1</sup> A digit in the date it bears is not clearly legible. Margoliouth reads 401/1010-1011 A. D. This document bears certain proof of fact that Nasta'liq style existed and practiced long before written. Another Persian inscription carved in relief on the wall of an ancient mosque in Armenia (Arze-Rum), discovered and published by Belin,<sup>2</sup> dated 351/960 A. D., although written after the Kufic style does not fully conceal the fact that the round (Naskh or Nasta'liq) style has been to look like the angular Kufic.

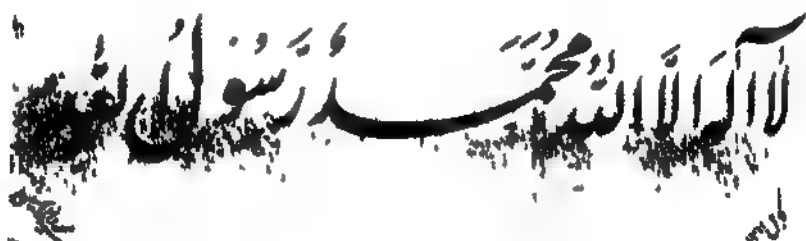


Fig. 111.

A specimen of modern Nasta'liq, confession of the Moslem faith, by Muhammad Da'ud al Husaini, Kabul.

It is true, though it sounds rather curious, that the Kufic prevailed in Persia longer than it did in Arabia. The round Nasta'liq was developed by the Persian. Its final horizontal flourishes considered to have been the result of the long habit of writing in the Pahlavi script that prevailed in Persia before the Arabs raided the country. Though the Nasta'liq style into being much earlier, books written in it only in the 13th century A. D. Persian poetical works first copied in it. However, the habit of copying the Koran and scientific works in Naskh and interlinear translations and marginal commentaries in the Nasta'liq, proves that the Nasta'liq style must have become more popular in Persia than Naskh a very early stage of its development.

1. JRAS. Oct. 1861.

2. Journal Asiatique, 1852, p. 376, plate II.

















Fig. 112.

A vase with white ground and the inscription painted in blue against a background of light conventional foliage, XVI century, Anatolia.



Fig. 113.

How  angle broadens into  might be observed by comparing the letter  or  of the Kufic style with that of the Naskh.<sup>1</sup> In the Kufic these letters  written in the form of  acute angle. In the Naskh this angle broadens into a curve;  the  of  into an obtuse . The upper  of the angle is bent at the top towards the right and the lower  running slantingly towards  left turns upward in  small  pointed  the top like the sting of a scorpion. If we place this Naskh  upside down (fig. 113) its curves would resemble the graceful bends

1. Most of the styles illustrated below are adopted from *Les Calligraphes et Les Miniaturistes*, 1908, pp. 21-62, *Subhu l-A'sha* vol. III, pp. 54-142, *Arzhang-i Cin*, 1925, *Nazm-i-Parwin*, 1935, *I'jaz-Raqam* ; *Oriental Penmanship*,  etc.








in the long neck of a crane, the  of the letter  would suggest the beak of the  turned towards the right. The  marking the shoulder of the  is  used in Naskh, it is peculiar to Nasta'liq, and forms the letter  Nasta'liq placed upside down.



Fig. 114






The  forming  base of this letter  is peculiar to styles in Naskh (fig. 114). The same curve will be observed in the final flourishes of  other letters of the Arabic script. This curve, which just avoids an angle, becomes a crescent  in Nasta'liq. Curves and strokes shown in figs. 115—118, are peculiar to Naskh.



Fig. 115.



Fig. 116.



Fig. 117.










Fig. 118.

Suls is the ornamental variety of the Naskh style. In its structure it differs from the  only in the proportion of its 
















Fig. 119.

and strokes which  about three times the size of the Naskh (fig. 90). The Suls brings out with full emphasis the wavy movement suppressed in the peculiar curves and strokes of the Naskh style. In the Suls style strokes take the form of a dagger and  run smoothly like  of water (fig. 88). As this style  generally used as an ornament, architectural  otherwise, it  written in bold  and



Figs. 120, 121.

wide swinging  slightly recoiling  their pointed tops. This sweep is  in the Diwani style of the Turks and in Shikasta. The Suls sweep  that of a curved dagger, as shown in figs. 120 and 121. This sweep might be written in  in a straight stroke or in a broadly curved  (fig. 122). However,  rebounding stroke  more common to  

any other style. The horizontal stroke both straight and curved might be written in  shown in fig. 123. Fig.  is a beautiful specimen  Shikasta-amiz calligraphy, by Sayed Muhammad Da'ud



Fig 

■ panel ■ decorative naskh, written in gold by the celebrated calligraphist  
'Abdullah Tabbakh, Santiniketan Museum.





Fig. 123.

■ panel of Naskh calligraphy by [redacted] Tabbakh, dated 1007/1598 A.D.  
Santiniġetan Mużewm.

al-Husaini. It is in a style mixed of Nasta'liq and Shikasta.

Of the ornamental flourishes most graceful is perhaps that of the style known as Riqā' (fig. 126). It is surely more decorative than Suls. Its strokes move with the grace of a running snake like the ripples of a stream.



Fig. 124.



Fig. 125.



Fig. 126.

Riqā' is not similar to the style known as Tauqī', far as I judge. It seems to be only a decorative way of writing the Naskh and resembles Suls. When these curves curl up into small knots and the strokes become pointed and thinner in their breadth, we have the style called Zulf-i-'arus, i. e. "locks of the bride". It is in



Fig. 127.



Fig. 128.

fact a decorative style of the Nasta'liq type (figs. 127, 128, 142). Resembling the Suls in its pointed stroke but

peculiar in its execution is the style called Riḥān. Its strokes end in straight points and rarely turn up in a curve or a loop, as they do in the Suls and Zulf-i-'arus styles. Its strokes are thick in the middle and gradually become thinner towards their ends. Sometimes they are like straight shafts descending slantingly towards the left.



Fig. 129.

In fact, these strokes rarely horizontal in their position (fig. 129). In the proportion of its curves and strokes it slightly differs from Suls. The swinging flourishes of the type used in Suls, Riqā' and Shikasta also used in the old Maghribi Naskh.

The Gulzar and the Ta'us are not styles in themselves, they are purely ornamental treatments of other styles. These are not written with the pen in the regular manner, but are drawn in outline and then filled in with decorative lines (fig. 130), with flowers (fig. 131) or animals (fig. 132) or peacock in each treatment is named differently as Gulzar, or Ta'us. In Ta'us letters are traced in a way that they resemble peacocks in their outlines. The outlines within



Fig. 130.



important [REDACTED] that strokes in the Muhaqqiq are seldom written slantingly and [REDACTED] of the horizontal strokes is ever pointed.

Among the decorative styles or decorative treatments of the Arabic script Bihar is perhaps [REDACTED] least decorative. It is a peculiar



Fig. 136.

style, almost Naskh in the structure of its characters, but its strokes, that shoot horizontally, begin from a thin point and gradually grow thicker towards their left end and either terminate in a sharp point resembling [REDACTED] of Rihaṇ or in a blunt solid point peculiar to the Nasta'liq style (fig. 136).



Fig. 137.



Fig. 138.

The specimen given in fig. [REDACTED] might be observed for forming [REDACTED] exact idea of the nature of a Nasta'liq stroke. Curves in the Naskh and Suls [REDACTED] not quite

The Nasta'liq style is the latest. No other style has succeeded it, nor is it [REDACTED] likely to be. In it [REDACTED] develop into most sensual forms—either round and supple like the crescent or smooth and oval like an egg. Its strokes are long and sharply or bluntly pointed in the form of a straight sword or a scimitar. In it strokes flow easily, either straight horizontally, or with a slight gradually increasing bend towards the middle in the [REDACTED] of a sword. These strokes (excepting those of the letters *k* and *s*) never descend slantingly [REDACTED] they do in Suls, Riqa', Rihaṇ, Diwani and Shikasta (figs. 137-40). The speci-



Fig. 139.



Fig. 140.

round (figs. 122, 123); they have, particularly the Suls ones, the grace [REDACTED] line [REDACTED] descends down the neck of a duck and passing round the belly ascends to [REDACTED] tip of [REDACTED] (fig. 119). This curve [REDACTED] the characteristic curve of the Suls. The wavy character of Suls [REDACTED] is marked in the curve [REDACTED] is peculiar to letters resembling the letter *j* (fig. 141). This



Fig. 141.



Fig. 142.



Fig. 143.

curve, but for the recoiling flourish in the centre and the beginning of the letter, is Nasta'liq in its roundness. Hence not peculiar to the Suls. Other like that of the letter 'a' to most of the styles (fig. 144). Curves in Zulf-i-'arus, like its strokes, either turn at the end in a coil upward downward descend in the form of wavy hair.



Fig. 144.

Dots rounded heads of letters like those of the Ar. *m*, *f*, *q*, *w*, or *h* have been written in a variety of ways, some of which are shown in figs. 144 and 145.

There are a few more styles that are mentioned in works on calligraphy, but I have not illustrated them they are not in any way important types of writing. For example, the style known as (thubar is simply a very fine writing. Letters in it small that they appear almost fleeting dust.



Fig. 145.

The Shafi'a style is derived from Nasta'liq. In this style are often left half curves and prolonged to an extent that they resemble slanting strokes.

The Hilali is a style in which letters written in a way that they look as if composed of crescent



Fig. 146.

The Badral-Kamal, the Vilayat and the Tauqi' (fig. 146) are, properly speaking, imperfect distortions, however ingenious, of the Nasta'liq style.

The Shikasta, or broken style, is a further simplification of Nasta'liq, and is, in fact, a sort of short-hand. Letters are rarely disconnected from each other in commonly used style, nor are diacritical dots or vowels ever written. Though at first sight looks like having been written in a careless way, yet it requires much practice to write it well. This

style came into existence in courts, secretariats and business offices where the writing of letters and other documents had to be done hastily. In it ——— turn into long-flung strokes, curved naturally in



Fig. 147.



Fig. 148.

the sweep of the pen. Calligraphists have moulded even these broken forms of letters written in haste into some sort of grace. As far as reading is concerned, this style is the most inconvenient (figs. 147, 148).

The most ingenious use of the Arabic script is the one technically known as Tughra. A sentence from the Koran or a ——— prayer is written in a way that the composition outlines a bird, a tiger or an elephant, or any other animal excepting those considered unclean or of ill-omen. Such Tughra writings are used as amulets by the superstitious masses. The lion or the tiger, which are symbolic of the valour of 'Ali, are mostly used in Tughra and the prayer composed of such figures, called Nad-i-'Ali, is addressed to him and is supposed to protect the keepers from the malicious influence of evil spirits.

Such animal figures, in spite of the ban the priest has put on them, form a very



Fig. 149.

object of decoration used in Moslem homes. They serve the double purpose of decoration and of warding off the evil spirit from the house. The figure of the tiger (fig. 151) has a text in Urdu which informs that a Hindu or Moslem — any one who has faith in this drawing and hangs it on the wall of his house, would be — from all — of evil



Fig. 150.

influences. The Tughra is written at an auspicious time. A rather favourite form of Tughra used for such magical purpose is the parrot ( fig. 149 ).

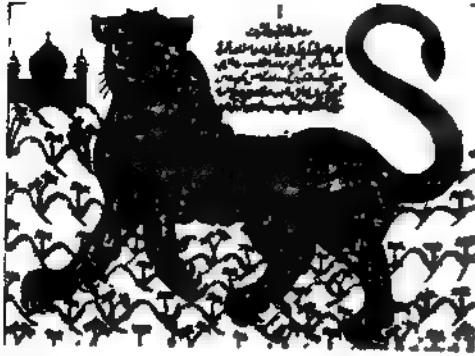


Fig. 151.

signify. Fig. 154 shows an example of writing such names in the form of a human head. The elephant, with the *huolu* on its back ( fig. 152 ), is produced by arranging the and designation of the Nawwab of Tawara.

I might mention here a very way of writing in the Tughra style ( fig. 153 ). The writing is done in Kufic and the example belongs to the period when Kufic was not yet obsolete. The upper portion

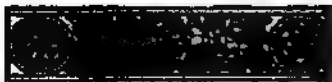


Fig. 153.

of letters in the writing is decorated with drawings of human and animal figures that the letters below seem to form part of the lower limbs of their bodies or top shoes worn by them. The decoration is a lively scene of a procession. The letters are deeply to keep in contrast with figures above them. Tughra is most commonly used in seals, wherein names are engraved in beautiful ways ( fig. 157 ). Less Tughra in decorative form but

Tughra need not be rily in animal figures, it might be written in any other ingenious way, would require a good deal of deciphering before can read it. Names of Allah, Muhammad, his daughter and those of the succeeding Kalifs generally written in various becoming ways that help in keeping in mind the characters of those whom the

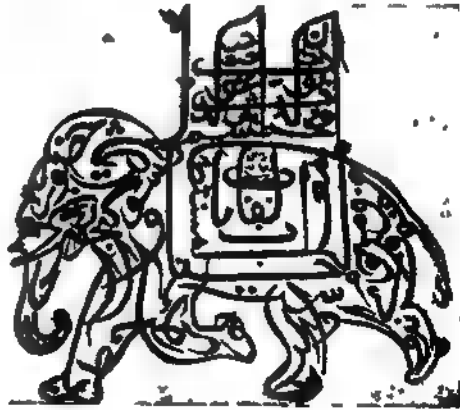


Fig. 152.

decorated with drawings of human and animal figures that the letters below seem to form part of the lower limbs of their bodies or top shoes worn by them. The decoration is a lively scene of a procession. The letters are deeply to keep in contrast with figures above them. Tughra is most

more complicated than the ordinary way of writing is the style used in the ornamentation of glazed earthen ware and metal vessels. Like the Kufic, though not in as much complicated manner, Thuluth and Nasta'liq styles have been used in the decoration of walls and ceramics ( figs. 9, 82, 83, 88, 89, 90, 93, 96, 100, 107, 155-160 ).

The technique and most of the designs used in the decoration of wall



Fig. 154.



Fig. 155.

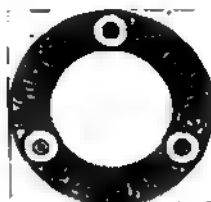


Fig. 156.

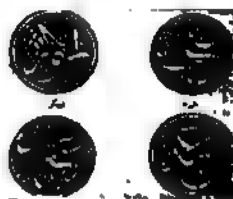


Fig. 157.



Fig. 158.



Fig. 159.

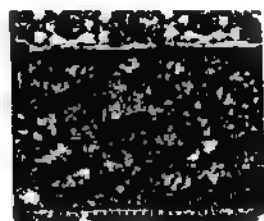


Fig. 160.

faces, and the ceramics adopted from the Kufic. Particularly the march of perpendicular lines the concentric convergence of these lines used in Naakh and Nasta'liq decorations ( figs. 82, 83 ), but the result rarely reached the same fitness of the means with the subject and the perfection that the script decoration had reached in the Kufic period.

The Tughra styles engraved at Murshidabad during the 15th century A. D. ( figs. 162, 163 ) examples of the type of the decorative style of writing that prevailed in Bengal till the advent of the British. We find that the Kufic model with its verticle strokes running in procession is still before the calligraphist. Excepting in such early architectures the tomb of Altamash, and the Mosque Fatehpur Sikri ( fig. 9 ) decorative calligraphy of most of the buildings of period is tame in comparison with that of the period



in Persia. Bengal stones perhaps represent the most deteriorated examples of monumental writing. Nothing        be        ugly in writing than the Gour inscription of the reign of Shamsuddin Altamash, dated 688/1285 A. D., inscribed on        well built by Kutlugh Khan. <sup>1</sup> Inscriptions engraved in such atrocious style               in Bengal. Some of the inscriptions found in Murshidabad district ( figs. 162, 163 ),



Fig. 161.

Detail of an inscription ( fig. 93 ), Mustansir billah Madrawa (630 A. H. ), Baghdad.

are good and perhaps the best among engraved inscriptions found in Bengal. The varticle line is the chief attraction of such inscriptions, while the style of the calligraphy is a mixed one.<sup>2</sup>

Calligraphic painting        silk and ivory and carving        metals, wood, ivory and stone, are,        I have mentioned, among the most

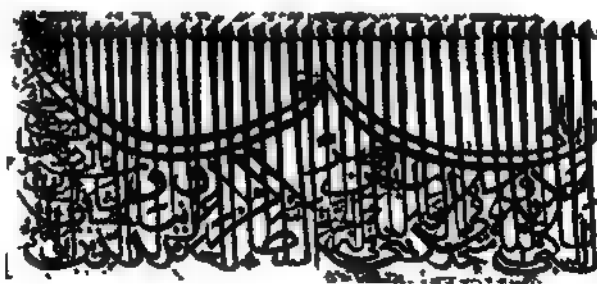


Fig. 162.

Inscription of the reign of 'Ala uddin Husain Shah, dated 905/1499 A. D., Babargram, Murshidabad.

popular        of this art.        and Nasta'liq styles, though        difficult of execution on hard material because of their round       

1. Arch. Survey of India, Vol. XV, pl. XX.

2. JASB, N. S. July 1917, plates III, VI.

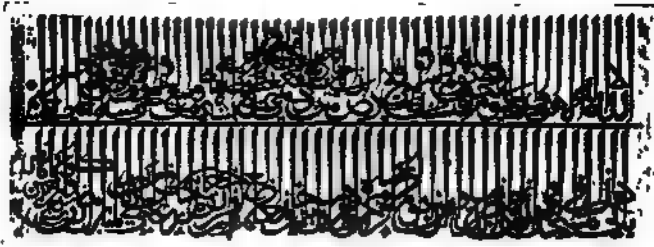


Fig. 163.

Inscription recording the excavation of the tank Sagar Dighi, dated 931/1515, A. D., Murshidabad.

pointed **■** and strokes than the angular Kufic, have been used with great **■** and not infrequently have surpassed the workmanship of the days of the Kufic. The brass tray bearing inscription in decorative Naskh, inlaid with silver, with the name of Sultan Sha'ban<sup>1</sup> (XIV century A. D.), bronze **■** and candlesticks, chandeliers, writing cases, Koran boxes and cisterns, etc., inlaid with gold or silver, **■** of the finest examples of which **■** preserved in the various **■** of Europe, Egypt and Persia, bear calligraphic inscriptions of unapproachable beauty.

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